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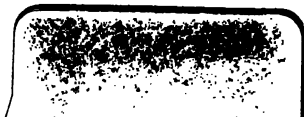
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THE WILL-O'-THE-WISPS.



Frontispiece.

The Night was no longer dark to him.

Page 44.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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THE WILL-O'-THE-WISPS

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF

MARIE PETERSEN

BY

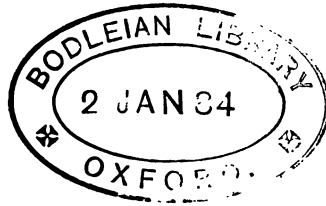
CHARLOTTE I. HART

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The Translator's Preface.

HE tale translated in the following pages, from the thirty-fourth edition of the German original, is one of simple though somewhat unusual construction. It opens by introducing to the reader two young Collegians, Walter and Albert, returning to their homes for the Midsummer Vacation, who part on the Mountain Ridge overlooking the little village of Nordingen, under tryst to meet again on the same spot, when returning, after a month, to resume their College studies.

One of these lads, Walter, taking a short cut on foot towards his home, rests beside a pool at the edge of the forest, where he becomes aware of a conversation carried on by forest things, of whose conversational powers he has previously had no idea. Among these are a company of Will-o'-the-Wisps, which the Authoress has personified as the Spirits of Lights once made use of in human habitations; and a number of them—attracted perhaps to the neighbourhood of the boy's resting-place by some mysterious sympathy, resulting from their service, as Lights, having been connected with incidents in the history of his parents—relate the events of their lives while subject

to the control of Human Beings ; and from their successive narratives Walter obtains a sad insight into the history of his mother, in which the unselfish love and the ready self-sacrifice of the pure-minded Ulrich are contrasted with the very different characteristics of his brilliant but unprincipled brother Clement, and the fatal consequences of the conduct of the latter are made known to Walter, who also hears narrated some incidents of his own early childhood.

The concluding chapter of the volume details the results of Walter's night in the forest, and explains why he failed to keep his tryst on the Mountain Ridge.

The principal events of the story are, owing to the peculiarity of its construction, necessarily displayed, as it were, in a series of detached Scenes, described to the inhabitants of the forest by the Will-o'-the-Wisps. I wish that, in my translation, I had been better able to do justice to the vividness of the descriptions, and to the mingled pathos and quiet humour which have made the original such a favourite as it is in its own Land.

C. I. H.

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The Willows of the Wisp

D. H. P. 1904

The Will-o'-the-Wisps.

CHAPTER I.

Storm and Sunshine.—The Schoolfellows' tryst on the Mountain Ridge.

It had been stormy for several days. The heavy thunder-clouds could not find their way out from among the clefts in the hills. They loomed defiantly over steep precipices, or moved up the face of the mountain, by ways so steep and dizzy that neither hunter nor sure-footed mule could have followed their course, or they sank deep down into the ravines, roaring with their voices of thunder through every rift and cavern.

The affrighted wild animals had sought refuge in caves and thickets, and the mountain-swallow, which builds on the steep sides of the rocks, ventured no more into the upper air, but skimmed along close to the ground, and almost brushed the grasses with the dark points of her wings, as she flitted tremulously hither and thither.

The Storm-wind had rushed through the valleys in quick, angry gusts, as the forerunner of bewildering torrents of rain. Fierce and frantic as he is, he had taken little heed even of the stateliest and most beautiful trees of the forest, which had stretched forth their green arms beseechingly towards him; and though a slim and pliant birch had here and there escaped unhurt from his wild embrace, yet many a noble oak and evergreen pine suffered with broken limbs for his rough greeting.

The Showers, the sisters of the Storm-wind, almost equalled their brother in fierceness and love of mischief. Born of the same cloud, they flung themselves with the same unbridled fury and strength upon the hills and meadows. Gathering together in the ravines, rushing over the precipices, they swept irresistibly before them everything that came in their way—rolled trees and heavy stones down from the mountains, and mercilessly tore great rents in the green velvet mantle which the Spring had pityingly spread around the bare shoulders of the crags.

Woe, above all else, to the ripening corn through which they cleared a way for themselves. The tender stalks were levelled to the ground, never again to rise. Overwhelmed by mire and stones, they died a miserable death—they to whom every sunbeam had foretold future triumphs ; how in their golden

out half-way up the hill, the eye could traverse the distance unchecked.

Two young travellers were standing arm-in-arm on this spot, and looking with sparkling eyes at the landscape, veiled by mist and evening shadows, which lay spread out at their feet.

The steep and rugged mountain stretches forth two great arms into the country ; and, grasping a portion of the fruitful plain which spreads out towards the far-off stream, seems to have seized it for its own property. It is a tract of lovely verdure which, protected from the north and east winds, and embraced by those strong arms, rests warm and sheltered on the rocky bosom of the ancient mountain.

Nourished by its springs, ever increasing in prosperity, adorned with fertile fields and meadows, with wooded hills and fruitful

gardens, it looks upward, laughing and grateful, to the hill-top, creeps smilingly, with its fresh young verdure, into the wildest ravines of the mountain, climbs with daring growth of trees and fragrant sheltering foliage up steep acclivities, and fearlessly makes its way across dreadful chasms and precipices, in order to crown the stern brow of some lonely cliff, with one or two dark pines, or with a waving plume of light green birches; or, spreading gently aside, it lays itself to rest where merry mountain rills leap bubbling forth around it.

It was not the setting sun alone that threw so bright a radiance over the two lads who were standing on the mountain ridge; for, beaming forth from within them, there could be seen on their youthful faces the glowing sunshine of the summer holidays which had just begun,—that sparkling boyish joy which

looks upon a few weeks' respite from the imprisonment of school, with full liberty to roam at will over wood and field, as an eternity of inexhaustible delight. And when there is also a journey back to the distant home, a re-union with parents and brothers and sisters, and a re-visiting of all the beloved spots in house and garden which are gilded with recollections of the first dawns of consciousness—then how the young heart is stirred to a clear flame of happiness!

Both boys, now nearly grown to be young men, had come from a large town on the other side of the mountain. The lumbering stage-coach by which they had travelled could move but slowly along the mountain roads, made heavy by the rain; and while it was waiting for a fresh relay of horses at the last posting-station, one of the youths had left the stifling inn-parlour, and climbed the hill by a well-

known footpath. His friend, who hastened after him, had just overtaken him, and now stood by him panting as he looked into his glowing face.

“How hot you must be,” said he, smiling. “You climb just like a chamois; I could hardly overtake you.”

“Oh, I feel quite at home here,” exclaimed the other merrily. “I know every tree and stone hereabouts. I could even find my way by night, and have often enough climbed up among these rocks after sundown, to catch night moths. Our travelling companions have worried me the whole day; I never could abide the fellows, and down in that fusty little parlour their confused babble was really too much.”

“They are good youths though,” rejoined his friend. “A little bit wild and rough, but downright honest. I think they would

have liked well enough to have challenged us to join their game of cards, but your *grandiose* demeanour frightened them."

"Well, I am glad they were not more venturesome. But look around you, man. Can you feel sorry up here that you did not remain down below?"

"No, truly," said the first speaker. "It is splendid up here, and the distant view repays one richly for damp clothes and a steep climb. The rain has quite ceased too, and the slanting sunbeams are shining right into the wooded ravines, and shewing the glittering mountain-rills falling into the valleys. Just look at the little old church yonder on the hill. The golden cross on its steeple glows as if it were on fire."

"That is Nordingen church!" was the joyous answer. "You can see the gable-end of our little house to the left, at the



That is Nordingen Church.

corner of the wood, deep down in the valley. The two windows which are now reflecting the sunlight so brightly are those of our guest-chamber. You shall inhabit that room if you will come to pay us a visit next year. How I wish I could take you home with me now! Why did your sister choose to be married in these holidays?"

"Well, but it is a good thing she is to be married in these holidays, for then I can be present. Still, I would gladly have gone to you. How delightful it will be next summer! Do those little houses yonder belong to your Nordingen too?"

"Oh, yes. The cottages of the peasants and of the weavers are dotted about among those gardens and little fields. We used to be able to see the manor-house from here too, but the elms and lime-trees in the park have grown so much, that they

now entirely hide the desolate, melancholy building."

"Does no one live there, then?"

"The steward and his wife and children live in one wing, but the principal part of the house is quite empty, and the shutters are very seldom unclosed, or the curtains undrawn. My father often goes over there to see that everything is in good order, and that nothing is falling into disrepair."

"Will the young heir always live in England?"

"Oh, no. He is only being educated there in charge of some relations of his father, and is to return here as soon as he is of age. Yonder, close to the church, where the tall fir-trees overtop the roof, are the graves of his grand-parents. My father was very much attached to the old family. As long as I lived at home he used to make me lay fresh

flowers on the grave every Sunday during the summer, and he himself, or old Bridget, used often to go with me. The churchyard extends down the other side of the hill nearly to the park. I have seen many a coffin lowered into the earth down there."

"I suppose your mother is buried there too?" asked his friend in a lowered tone.

"Oh, no," said the other sadly. "My mother died while travelling far away, when I was quite a child. She does not rest in German soil."

If you, dear reader, had sat opposite these boys all day in the stage-coach, and listened to their cheerful conversation, and if you had afterwards heard this simple answer, and watched at the same time the sudden cloud that overspread the speaker's face, perhaps you would have discovered why it was that his countenance specially attracted you; why

it was that your eyes could not help dwelling on his firm, finely-cut features, his earnest mouth, his dark dreamy eyes, beaming with a child-like purity which seemed to belong to another world. A serious and sorrowful expression lay on his youthful features, like a cloud-shadow on a landscape budding in the spring, and told of something other than the smiling days of blooming youth, and the delight of the newly-begun summer holidays; of something other than the simple memories of a schoolboy, who was bringing home excellent reports, and a prize besides. We are prone when we see on a child's face the traces of a thoughtfulness beyond its tender age, to look on into its future with a sad and inquiring gaze, and to forebode the young creature's early death. Yet how often is it that we see before us only the shadow thrown over the young life by a sorrowful past,

the traces of countless burning tears which fell on the infant in its cradle, the reflection of sad and serious faces, in whose presence the poor little thing first began to lisp and to smile.

And when the child is the only precious treasure of a lonely and sorrowful heart, a treasure, which for the sake of the dead, and because it must do without a mother's love, is fostered and cherished with all the more care, the dear Lord stamps on its face a passport to the love of all good and feeling hearts. And it was with this stamp on eye and brow that the stranger boy would have won your sympathy, dear reader; and you would not have needed to inquire his right to it, as soon as you knew that he was motherless.

His young companion seemed to feel something of this silent attraction, as he put his

hand on his friend's shoulder, and looking earnestly into his open, candid eyes, said affectionately,—

“But how glad your father will be to see you returning to-day; a whole day earlier than you were expected.”

“Oh, my father; my dear, dear father! May God help me never to give him cause for anything but happiness. You cannot believe, Albert, how frightened I feel sometimes, knowing, as I do, that all the joys and hopes of his life are centred in me. . . . And—if I were not to be such as he would have me to be . . . I, his only child!”

“Now that is too foolish!” cried the other, turning impatiently away from him. “You, who have been a prodigy from your very first day at school,—the delight of all your teachers! Why, even the Principal himself, who is so particular, has never found anything

to blame in you ; and now the boy fears lest his own tender father may fall into despair over the misguided good-for-nothing ! But you have promised me to bid adieu to all such miserable misgivings. You were happy and merry enough during the two days of our journey, constantly putting your head out of window to look at your mountains, though they were well covered up with rain-clouds till we were close upon them ! At night you never closed an eye ; and when the road began to ascend, did you not beg and cajole that captious fat gentleman, till he actually let you sit outside ? And now, on the very threshold of your home, with the beloved Nordingen before your eyes, you hang your head and indulge in all manner of fancies ! Come, come ! the shadows are lengthening, and we must not miss the coach."

“Oho!” exclaimed the other, withdrawing the arm which his friend had linked in his own; “do not think that I shall clamber into that stuffy box again, and drive the whole way to the Forest Inn, where no one expects me to-day, and where there will be no carriage to meet me. By walking through the wood, along that wheat-field, and through the Alder-swamp beyond, I shall be at home in a very little while. The landlord of the Forest Inn can take charge of my luggage till I send to fetch it to-morrow.”

“No, no, Walter; I do not think much of that plan,” returned his more prudent friend. “Just see how dark it is already down in the valley. The mist is rising out of every hollow, and might easily cause you some harm.”

“Ah! the veiled ladies! They would not hurt a child of the soil, though they might possibly be dangerous among those chasms

to one who was a stranger here and did not know his way. Have no care for me. Creep into your stage-coach, and remember me to the fat gentleman. But to-morrow, when you are at home with your parents, and sisters, and funny little brothers, then, in the midst of your own enjoyment, do not utterly forget me. I shall have much to tell my father about you."

"Dear Walter," returned the other, laying a hand on each shoulder of his friend, and looking sadly into his face, "I shall have to get on without you for four whole weeks! But when we return on the last Monday of July, shall we not again meet at the inn in the forest?"

"Yes, certainly; or, still better—up here! You must leave the coach before arriving at the inn, just at the Weissbach waterfall, and strike into the footpath which leads up to the left from the stream. Then you will get up here long before the coach; and you shall find

me here with my father, who will have come so far with me on my way. You shall also find here some luscious pears out of our own garden, and almond cracknels such as only old Bridget can make."

The cheerful sound of a post-horn broke in upon these last words, and the speakers could now hear the neighing of horses and the clatter of a heavily-laden coach in the forest behind them. A warm grasp of the hand, a lively "Farewell!" and "Good-bye!" and then one of the lads hastened back into the pine-wood to meet the coach, while the other pushed through the low coppice on the ridge, and, following an untrodden but well-known path, leaped down the giant steps of a natural staircase.



Good-bye.

Page 20.

CHAPTER II.

Walter's short-cut.—His Musings in the Forest.—And how he rested by the Frog-pool.

DESCENDING between high perpendicular walls of rock, Walter soon became the travelling-companion of a babbling mountain stream, which glided along among the stones, gleaming out coyly here and there like a little lizard, but quickly gathering strength and boldness in its course. The frequent thunder-showers had now made the rivulet so wild and overbearing, that the boy soon ceased to recognize, in its mad brawling, the voice of his play-fellow of old, and could no longer keep pace with the impetuous rush of the swollen stream.

Further down, where the Nixie's waterfall hung a transparent veil from the steep cliff above, across the Schwarzbach, the green rock-basin was flooded over its brim ; and only by keeping quite close to the mountain wall could Walter find a wet stone here and there on which to set his foot, in order to escape by its rocky portal.

Outside, the water had torn away the wooden bridge which used to lead over it to the fields. The brook was too much flooded and too strong to allow of the boy's crossing it by springing from stone to stone, as he had often done before, instead of using the more convenient bridge. He wandered along, therefore, for some way, exploring the bank, and at last resolved to keep to the left through the wood, and to cross the Schwarzbach by the stone bridge at Nordingen.

This would lengthen his way ; and, besides,

it was a way by which his father had formerly forbidden him to go alone in the evening, for there were quagmires in the wood, which afforded no footing, and which might be very dangerous to the ignorant or unwary traveller. But to-day there was no choice ; Walter knew the firm footpath so well, and besides, he was now two years older than he was when his father's command was laid upon him. He felt sure that his father would not now have made any objection had he been there himself. So he struck into a narrow footpath, which, leaving the stream, led deeper into the forest.

The excitement of the last few days, which had chased sleep from his eyes by night, and had even now urged him to climb the hill, and to race with the Schwarzbach in its swift course down the narrow gorge,—this excitement suddenly yielded to the deep hushed stillness of evening in the forest.

Walter, however, was not aware how tired he had become. He walked slowly along under the trees, and thought of the expeditions he had made here with his father, and of the old stories he had heard of things which were said to have happened in this part of the wood. A grey-haired huntsman, who was one of the last retainers of the old lord's family, and who was still living in the Manor-house, had told him the most wonderful of these tales.

It now recurred to the boy's memory that he was a "Sunday child." Old Bridget had confided to him that he had been born on a Sunday morning, just when the bells were ringing for church, and that consequently he would see more varied and stranger sights in the world than most other Christians, however good their eyes.

He had asked his father once what were the

privileges of "Sunday children" who had been born, like himself, while the church bells were ringing. And his father had replied that children who had been greeted at their birthday by a blessing from the church bells, were right well off; for that, when the Lord God calls His people together with the sound of the bells, it is in order to pour forth grace and blessing upon them, and that Walter's own dear mother had listened to the holy sound as if it were the assurance of a blessing, when she held her newly-born little child in her arms, and thanked God with fervent prayer for the little son He had given her, and had promised to watch over him earnestly and faithfully, and to bring him up according to His will. His dear mother was no longer here, but he himself was quite old enough to know God's will; and if he began early to honour this holy will, and to watch and strive for the

gifts of God's grace, the time would surely come when he should see more and more glorious things than other men could see, who had gone to sleep and never been awakened by the voice of the bells.

His father had taken him into his room, where hung the beautiful large picture of his dear dead mother, and had told him of much that was lovable in her : what an angel she had been,—the joy and delight of all who knew her,—and how deeply she had loved her little Walter. Even though she had gone through bitter trials,—and the poor mother had indeed suffered long and deeply,—yet all would be forgotten when her child was brought into her room. She would then laugh and play with him, and would herself become a child once more ; and when he first began to walk, she had used her little remaining strength to guide his tottering steps herself.

And at last,—when, on her death-bed in a foreign land, she had laid aside all earthly cares, and had even overcome the bitter pang of parting with her boy,—she had whispered with a happy smile, that she could hear the church bells as they had sounded when her Walter was born. They were the morning bells of the new day which was dawning upon her.

The young traveller had become very serious; his thoughts had led him far back into the past, and, as he had often done before, he was besieging with a thousand unanswered questions,—with dark, anxious doubts and conjectures,—the unknown grave of his early-lost mother, the particulars of whose life were veiled from him in obscurity. His father and old Bridget, who alone could have given him all the information he desired, had refused to do so, and when he had asked searching questions, had put him off until

some future time, when his understanding should be riper.

They told him, however, of single little traits of his mother's goodness and self-devotion, of her humble simplicity, and of her loving care for others; and while, by such communications, they had done everything to fan the natural love of his mother in the boy's ardent soul to a glowing flame of enthusiastic veneration, they had, whether inadvertently or on purpose, omitted to supply a definite background to the sacred image which they had placed in the shrine of his heart. The searching eye of the motherless boy strove in vain to recover his lost parent from the shadowy realm of misty dreamland, and to obtain a clear and distinct picture of her earthly life.

A long and incurable illness had brought the young mother to her early grave; but when the father spoke of the sufferings which

she had to bear,—and when, at the mention of them, silent tears coursed down the faithful Bridget's furrowed cheeks and fell upon her folded hands,—then Walter felt deeply convinced that there had been more amiss with the dying woman than mere bodily suffering.

His mother must have been unhappy! good and pure as an angel, beloved and honoured as a saint at her death, but unhappy while on earth! Unhappy?—and yet she had his father, that ideal of all imaginable perfection, and her little Walter, whom she had so ardently loved. Here was the great riddle of the poor boy's life, the riddle which he had spent years of his youth in trying to solve!

Once when he had urged old Bridget with impatient questions, mingled with tender entreaties, she had begged him with tears not to tempt her to be disobedient and dishonourable to her good master. Such a request had

precluded all further investigations on the subject. His father's will was sacred to Walter ; he felt a deep and reverent awe with regard to the secret of the past, which was so painful to his dearly-loved parent. But how would it be now that he was returning home after a long absence, so much older and more thoughtful ? Would his father be more communicative to him now ? Would he deem him worthy to have the seal of mystery, which had been set on the bygone years, broken for him, and to be allowed a full insight into the early life of his parents ?

Busied with such thoughts, Walter had wandered along under the green forest-roof without noticing how the twilight was deepening. Now the path inclined for a short way steeply downwards, as if the mountain had thrust one more rocky step into the valley. The trees stood less thickly together here, and



Under the green forest-roof.

Walter could look around him with more freedom.

Right before him, at the foot of the slope, lay a luxuriantly green meadow surrounded by forest trees, and close to it a still, reedy pool which stretched itself out through the wood towards the west, and allowed the Schwarzbach to enter its silent waters at the spot where the Alder-swamp and meadow-land met together.

Only a small portion of the smooth, watery mirror was disturbed by the rushing brook. The little wavelets which it raised in its passage broke on either side against the roots of the trees on the bank, or rippled shyly a little further across the cool smooth surface of the water, until the reeds which stood waiting around, caught them and sang them gently to sleep. Here in the wood, where the rarely trodden footpath wound down to the pool, the water lay dark and still as death. Little oak-

twigs, broken off by the storms, rested on its smooth surface as motionless as the broad leaves and white flower-stars of the water-lily. The weary west wind had gone to rest with the sun ; the rents in the cloud-curtain had closed up again, and the clouds had sunk nearer to the earth ; while from behind their edges there still glimmered two or three streaks of evening light. The air was sultry ; and the only sound which broke the silence, was the melancholy croaking of the frogs, which had given to the Frog-pool its uncouth name.

Walter knew the place well, and had never passed it without a slight shudder. The green meadow, a marsh covered with the rankest vegetation, had been called by the country-folk, "The Spectre-field," and "Dead-man's Garden" ever since, many years ago, a learned botanist had been swallowed up there,

and soon afterwards a poor widow from the mountain, who had come with her little boy to look for sticks in the forest, had also perished in the swamp. All kinds of evil apparitions were said to haunt the place. The learned gentleman who had met his death there, had been, they said, an arrant atheist, who had never gone to church; but had had fellowship with wicked spirits, which still made his grave their nightly trysting-place. The peasants of the neighbourhood, when they passed alone through the wood, tried to avoid this spot; and the narrow foot-path which skirted the marsh was but seldom made use of. In several places, indeed, all trace of it had been hidden by the rapid growth of grass and mosses. Walter, however, felt no fear of the unknown wonders of the wood; he liked the awe which they awoke in him. The mysterious had always possessed a great

charm for him, and to-day this lonely spot wove a magic web around the weary boy.

It struck Walter that, in order thoroughly to surprise his father, he ought to stay in the wood until it should have become quite dark. He did not wish to be espied afar off, as he approached the house, but thought it would be very delightful to enter suddenly and unexpectedly. Old Bridget was infirm and timid, so he would spare her; but he would slip through the garden to his father, who was wont to write or read in his own room late in the evening, and would step in at his window, as he had been used to do when a little boy. It was so delightful in the wood, that here would he await the right moment.

Walter laid himself down on the slope, under a gigantic maple; the pool and the marshy meadow were reposing side by side at his feet; the forest encompassed them both

with its verdant garlands, and the tall bulrushes, the pride of the pool, had reared a long stalk here and there among the wild flowers, as a warning flag to the traveller not to trust the treacherous ground. Straight in front of the boy's resting-place, the bulrushes had parted asunder and allowed him to see through them. The water here filled a little creek, formed by a narrow tongue of land which the Spectre-field thrust out into the pool; and this creek—bordered on one side by wild flowers and tender grasses, and on the other by rough brambles and tresses of moss which hung down into the water from the rocks on the slope—was the narrow world of a Water-lily, which had to-day for the first time unfolded her bud to the rain-drops. The young flower had never yet lived through a night in the forest. She was resting silently in the middle of the creek on her green stem,

and looking wonderingly and anxiously forth into the twilight, while far-off lightning flashes played at long intervals among the tree-tops.

On the point of the tongue of land there stood a blasted oak-tree. As it stretched out its two remaining bare and blackened branches over the pool, its strange dark form looked in the twilight like some gigantic magician in a long trailing garment, striding towards the water, and casting forth his spells into the night with lean and outstretched arms. Behind it, over the marsh, hovered solemn trains of cloudy shapes, which often seemed to stand stark and still, and anon whirled madly about, when the slumbering night-breeze drew a deep breath, and the rushes shivered and sighed.

The grasshopper was singing his evening song, and the cry of the screech-owl was heard from the thicket. Walter was resting

with his head supported on his hand; his eyes dreamily followed the vaporous shapes on the marsh; his thoughts roved hither and thither like the driving mist; the boy's eyelids closed, and his straw hat rolled from his curly hair, as his tired heavy head sank down on the moss-clad root of the maple.

More loudly and mournfully complained the frogs in the pool. The screech-owl cried more sadly through the wood. The night-breeze arose, and mightily shook the tree-tops, fanning with its cool breath the sleeper's hot brow; but the boy heard and felt nothing. He lay wrapped in slumber, and the night-wind again went to rest, and the trees stood still as before.

CHAPTER III.

Night in the Forest.—The Midnight talk of Woodland Things.—The Will-o'-the-Wisps.

THE summer night had spread its darkest veil over the forest, the Spectre-field, and the Frog-pool. Now and then far-off sounds came through the air, at first singly, then two at once, then several in succession. The little church of Nordingen, that old grey watch-tower of eternity, told from its belfry the passing hours and their quarters; and its monotonous sermon on the fleetingness of Time sounded forth into the valley day and night.

In the light of day and the hurry of life its voice spoke to most men only of earthly things; it fell on the ears of the industrious

labourers and weavers around, warning them and urging withal ; it sent them to work, and called them to their simple meal, and to their evening rest. But at night, what did the old church clock say to them on their silent couch ? The happy and healthy, sunk in deep and peaceful sleep, did not perceive its voice ; but to those who were kept awake by physical or mental suffering—whose feeble frames were consumed by disease, or who, by reason of sadness and trouble and a sorrowful spirit, could obtain no rest for their souls, no slumber for their eyelids—what did the strokes of the clock say to such as those ? Did they seem like stern milestones, in passing which they counted with sighs how short joy and happiness had been, and how long was the affliction before them, and the rough way among thorns and pitfalls ? Did they know that one of these milestones—perhaps the very next one

—must be the boundary-stone of the unknown land into which they must enter when the joys and sorrows of earth should be for ever at an end? and did they shrink back from this boundary-stone, poor creatures?

Happy are ye only to whom the land beyond the boundary is not dark and unknown, but the brightly-glowing Land of Promise! Happy, even if racked by the pangs of disease, or sick at heart by reason of sorrow and trouble, yea, even of sin; for ye at least have a certain hope, and feel, at every stroke of the clock, the finger of God, which reaches even into your little human lives, counts your pulses, and stills their anxious throbbing, and can wipe away all tears from your eyes—the finger of God, warningly raised when ye stumble, to remind you: “Watch! Be faithful! be steadfast, and hope!”

The church clock of Nordingen struck once

more ; twelve hollow strokes sounded slowly forth upon the night ; and when the last had died away, a strange rustling and humming, a whirring and fluttering began to be heard in the wood, as if countless swarms of insects were flitting about, and as if the wind were struggling for mastery with the tops of the giant trees.

But the wind was not awake, the trees and bushes stood motionless, and of all the host of winged insects who were encamped in the forest for the yearly midsummer drill, only a pair of belated fire-flies were to be seen, who were not on duty that day. They were returning in their full-dress uniforms from a country ball which the Queen Bee had been giving in a garden in the valley. They must have been investigating the Elder-blossoms a little too deeply, and were now wandering about in the dark, intoxicated with the scent,

while they sought their green pavilion under the bushes on the slope.

A thousand creatures had awoke in the forest. A wondrous soft sound of whispering rose like a bewildering vapour from the damp earth; woodland talk for delicate fairy ears became audible far and near in the mild summer night. Little grasses and weeds poured forth their hearts to each other, and complained of the hard day's work which they had had, conveying raindrops since the early morning to water the gnarled old roots of trees, and the thirsty little mosses, who must always be to the fore when oaks and beeches are pampering themselves. Carrying water is a very tiresome task for wild pinks and quiet harebells, for tender Speedwell and for gentle Eyebright.

“Must we still stand here late into the night, bent double with holding great raindrops,” grumbled the wild Thyme peevishly,

“ without the least breath of air to take pity on us, and ease us of our burden by emptying the water from our pitchers ? ”

Three tall, elegantly-shaped grass-stalks were standing near, and they shook their delicate heads disapprovingly. One of them sharply rebuked the wild Thyme, and said,

“ What need have such sturdy little Thyme-blossoms to use big words, and to make a fuss, as if they were more unjustly treated than others because all the winds do not fly to their aid ? Just look at us, how much more *we* have to bear ! ”

And the grass-stalk, drawing itself up, raised with its weak and trembling spikelets a heavy raindrop, bright as silver ; and its companions cried, “ Look, look, ours are still larger ! ” Then, as they were all trying to hold up their burdens very high, they wavered and pushed against each other, and their three heavy

drops of water rolled into one another, and fell chill on the forehead of the sleeping boy.

Walter started up in affright, and, rubbing his sleepy eyes, raised himself into a sitting posture, supported by the maple trunk against which he leaned.

The night was no longer dark to him. With senses wonderfully sharpened he seemed to drink in the mysterious life of the midnight forest. The humming and whispering around him had become a language intelligible to him. The plants and insects seemed to be familiar friends; he listened entranced to their secret converse, and felt himself magically quickened, like some thirsty pilgrim who drinks the refreshing draught that wells forth from a cooling fountain.

Walter's movements, as he awoke and changed his position, disturbed the comfortable repose of a venerable frog, who had been

indulging in reverie among the broad leaves of colt's-foot on the bank. Full of fear and anxiety, the innocent dreamer withdrew from the uncanny neighbourhood of a human boot, a thing he had never seen before, and plunged head foremost into the midst of the creek, so that the water splashed up as it closed over him, and quite filled the white blossom which floated there. The wandering Fire-flies had but a little while ago discovered the young Water-lily, and had been in a flutter of admiration about her. They now politely approached and improved their acquaintance by helping to shake the clear drops from her white petals.

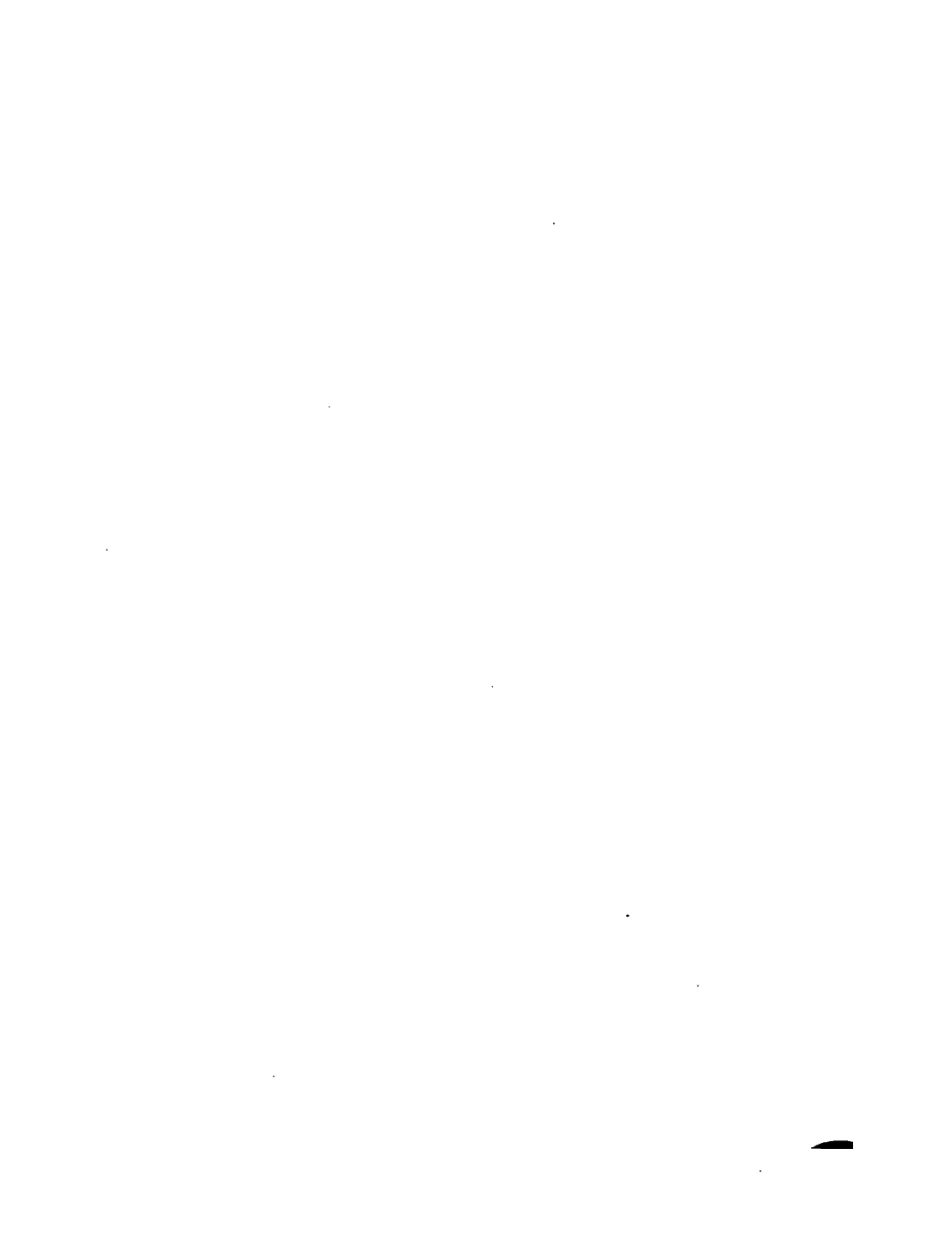
A remarkably hollow cough just then sounded from the coppice.

"Ah! Good evening, Professor. I have not had the pleasure of meeting you for a long while," exclaimed a Bat who was flitting in

zigzag flights around the blasted oak; and, as the Water-lily and the Fire-flies looked inquiringly around, the great spectacles of an old Horned Owl glared upon them from a thicket on the bank.

“I suppose you have come to the forest on account of the manœuvres,” continued the Bat. “You have missed a good deal already, Professor. The Cockchafers’ parade is over, and it was very imposing. The Cockchafer battalions are admitted to have the best music in the whole army.”

“Much I care for parades and field manœuvres,” snarled the Owl contemptuously. “I have come to this mountain merely for the purpose of pursuing some antiquarian investigations. There are said to be some rare Roman coins buried among the mountain ravines, which I wish to discover. To tell you the truth, I am making a long scientific





My Niece, this young Owlet.

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journey in the company, and for the interests of my niece, this young Owlet. The dear child is a great heiress; but her succession is disputed on the ground that her descent from the Owl of Minerva has not been satisfactorily demonstrated. This descent, however, is no mere family tradition; and we are now on our way to Italy and Greece for the purpose of collecting the evidence of ancient coins and sculptures to settle the question. Just look at the young lady, how proudly she carries her beak! how intellectual is the contour of her head! Ah! noble blood circulates under that bird's feathers!

The young Owlet fluttered with faultless grace across the creek, alighted on the blackened Oak-trunk, and saluted the Bat with a gracious bow.

“A rich heiress, and of good family!”

whispered one of the Fireflies to his companion.

“Yes, yes; an heiress let her be, and of very noble birth; but may I ignominiously struggle to death in the very next spider’s web, if she is not a consummate bluestocking! That runs in the blood, depend upon it. I can see it at once by the way she brandishes her beak,” and with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, which made his brilliant white epaulettes gleam amid the darkness, the Firefly turned away and continued to pay his attentions to the gentle Water-lily. He told her about the court ball given that day by the Queen Bee, and enumerated all the beauties who had been most admired at it: the Crimson Rose, and the Rosa Centifolia, the pale melancholy Tea-Rose, the Moss-Rose, the gay Burgundy Rose, and the coquettish little Rose of Dijon. He took pleasure in telling the

innocent young Water-flower, who certainly was no Blue-stocking, and had never yet had a glimpse of the world, all about its unknown splendour. He enjoyed seeing her child-like astonishment, and answering her artless questions.

There can be no more simple bringing-up than that on the watery mirror of a quiet reedy pool, especially when such pool lies in the double seclusion of a thick wood and of a narrow mountain valley. The water flowers which grow there out of the cool ground are humble children of nature, and know nothing of the vain self-consciousness of garden flowers. And when the Firefly "could not understand how it was that the lovely Water-lily had not been invited to the Queen Bee's ball," and when he told her that he "would take care that such an oversight should not occur again," she shook her head deprecatingly, and said she thought a

scentless and colourless Water-flower like herself would be out of place in a blooming Rose-garden; she would be frightened to death if she had to sit, like the roses, on tall bushes among thorns and prickles; and if bees and rose-beetles should flit round her with sweet speeches and witty questions, she would certainly not know how to answer them.

The little Firefly assured her that neither scent nor colour were thought much of at Court, for who could tell there whether the colour were natural or not! In Court circles only birth counted for much; but all Roses had the right of appearing at Court, and she too must be reckoned among the Roses.* He told her how highly two pale French ladies had been praised that day,—Madame Hardy and Madame Plantier,—and, above

* The reader must bear in mind that a water-lily is in Germany called a Water-Rose (*Wasser rose*).

all, the beautiful Southerner, Centifolia Unica, who was even paler than the other two.

The young Owlet on the oak-tree had listened to the conversation between the Firefly and the Water-lily for a little while, but thought it very silly and uninteresting,—in fact, Miss Owlet thought every conversation uninteresting in which she herself did not take the lead,—and therefore, out of pity for the others, she joined in the talk between them. She laughed at the Firefly's taking it for granted that Fräulein Water-lily must needs belong to the wide-spread family of the Roses, seeing that she bore an unmistakable resemblance, pointing to a relationship, to that much admired Indian Princess, who had but a few years ago come to Europe for the first time ; she meant *Victoria Regia*.

Victoria Regia was a name quite unknown

to the Water-lily. She went over in her mind all her relatives, whether acquaintances or otherwise, counting off on her petals her eight aunts and her twenty-seven cousins, but there was no *Victoria Regia* among them. She inquired of the little flowers on the bank, too, but even the blue Forget-me-nots (though they have the best of memories) could not remember ever having seen a blossom with so *grandiose* a name.

If vanity was not highly developed in the young Water-lily, she at any rate possessed a fair share of that other hereditary feminine failing, *curiosity*; and therefore, overcoming her dislike to the precocious and didactic tone of the young Owlet, she made further inquiries of her about the Princess Victoria.

The Owlet now recounted a very romantic history: how the *Victoria Regia* had come to Europe for love of a learned naturalist who

had made her acquaintance while on a long journey; how she could not endure the Northern climate, and how only the tenderest care made it possible to prolong her life in our country, where she lived generally in skillfully devised palaces of glass, and strengthened herself with tepid baths.

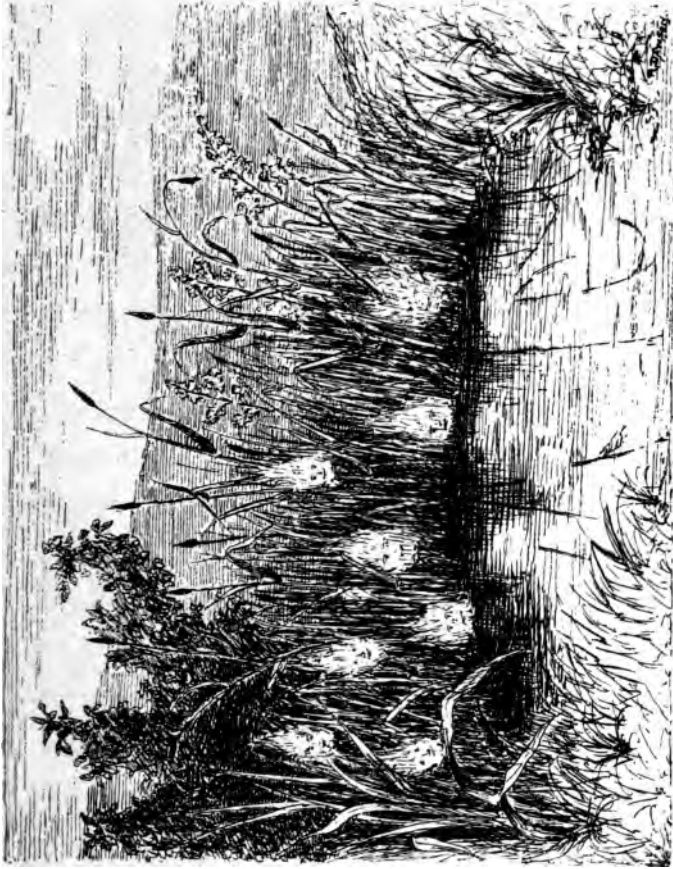
The young Owlet had hardly finished her narration, when all eyes were turned to the Spectre-field, where little points of flame appeared to emerge here and there out of the soft ground; now they would skip or glide, flickering to and fro over the morass; anon they would stand still, glimmering with a faint and uncertain light; then, flaring up anew, they would dance nearer; and then suddenly sink into the earth, appearing again, the next moment, in a fresh spot, and whirling around in circles on the points of the grasses, right up to the pool and the little creek.

“Oh! what is that? who are those?” asked the Water-lily in terror, as she hid herself trembling under her white petals.

“Hurrah, Ballet-dancers!” cried the Firefly, merrily. “Capital dancers for darkness and mist, but not of the *Corps de Ballet* of the Forest Opera. No Locusts or Grasshoppers among that lot.”

“They must be Hungarian ballet-dancers,” suggested the other Firefly, “who have come to our country with the gypsies, and like to dance on moonless nights in the open air. ‘Will-o'-the-Wisps’ they call them, I believe.”

And thereupon, as a slender radiant flame glided slowly to the margin of the water, the Firefly drew his glittering sword, and extending it towards the flame as he stepped forward to meet it, exclaimed in a stentorian voice,



'Will-o'-the-Wisp' they call them, I believe.

“Stand, wandering flame, stand! Give account of thyself. Who art thou?”

A soft titter was heard, and, with a mocking hiss, the flame sank into the earth.

“Oh, those are no living dancers,” whispered the timid Water-lily; “they must be goblins.” And as another little flame just then appeared, and remained standing at the edge of the morass, with one foot almost in the water, the white blossom exclaimed in terror: “All good spirits, praise ye the Lord.”

“For evermore, amen,” replied the flame; and, continuing clear and steady, it added, “I will willingly give you information, and tell you all about myself, and what I am, if only I am courteously questioned.”

“Give information as to what a Will-o'-the-Wisp is?” thought the listening boy under the maple, as he edged himself nearer to the bank. “Shall I now hear what no teacher knows?”

The young Owlet on the withered oak-stump had received a first-rate modern education. With a scornful elevation of her beak she now moved to a lower branch, in order to hear the better. It was but a few weeks since she had passed her examination as a female teacher, and afterwards given a public lecture, which lasted for two hours, upon electricity and hydrogen gas. After that, could a stupid Will-o'-the-Wisp pretend to know more than even she? The Fireflies placed themselves in attentive attitudes on the broad green leaves which floated around the Water-lily; and encouraged by their presence, the flower took heart, and asked of the Will-o'-the-Wisp in a gentle friendly voice,

“Now then, tell me who you are—you and your companions?”

“Spirits of the departed are we—the spirits of extinguished lights. For a short time we

served mankind on the earth, until an untimely and violent death tore us thence, ere we could burn to an end on our wicks, and expire in ashes. But he who suddenly loses his life by violence can find no rest in death ; and when poor tapers have been mischievously thrown on the ground, or meanly blown out before they have fulfilled their time, their spirits are condemned to wander restlessly about for a long while, to dazzle and mislead by their treacherous, unearthly glimmer. Such wandering Spirits of Lights are we—I and my companions.”

“Did you serve mankind?” asked the Water-lily. “Do tell me how that was. I have never learned to serve, and have never seen a human being.”

“You have never seen a human being?” sneered the young Owlet. “Most likely you do not even know what human beings are?”

“Yes, yes, I do know about human beings ; I know what the Frogs have told me about the skeleton of a drowned man, which lay for a hundred years at the bottom of the pool. But it is so sad what the Frogs say ; and once, a long, long time ago, more than a week, I think, when I was quite a little .bud, and did not reach up to the surface of the water, there glided a thick dark shadow across the pool. The water broke against it, and the Frogs said the shadow was a boat, and there were human beings in it. How gladly would I have looked into it. I stretched myself up as high as I could, but I was too small. Once a smiling face, with bright clear eyes, bent over the edge ; but at the same moment the oar struck the water close to the beautiful image, and destroyed it as soon as it appeared. The trembling water moved hither and thither, and before it could again collect the picture,

the boat had passed. Oh, tell me a great deal about human beings; I should like to learn something fresh!"

"You will learn nothing from me," said the Will-o'-the-Wisp, "for I have not much to tell you. My life was very short, and I can only relate what I myself have seen and heard and experienced. No learned book-history, smooth and well-finished, and bearing a useful moral, but only scattered scraps of life, without either beginning or end. You will make nothing out of such."

"Oh! do but begin, good Will-o'-the-Wisp, do but begin your story," entreated the Water-lily.

CHAPTER IV.

*The Spirit of the Christmas Taper.—The Christmas Tree.—
The Young Mother, and the Motherless Boy.*

THEN the little Flame cleared its throat, flared up more brightly, and began thus :—

“I was a Christmas taper ; but have you ever heard of Christmas tapers ?”

“Have we heard of them !” sneered the young Owlet. “One need not fly far to do that. In the very next ravine there stand young fir-trees on every slope, and in the evening twilight they chatter about future days—about all the splendour which such pine-children may hope to experience. I was quite astonished yesterday to find how many a young pine has no dearer wish than

to become a Christmas tree, and to be adorned with brilliant Christmas tapers and gaudily-coloured cut paper! The short-lived pleasure is dearly bought, and brings them death; but of this such young Conifers take no heed."

"The young Firs die a beautiful death, though, if they become Christmas trees, and bear Christmas tapers," said the Will-o'-the-Wisp. "We Christmas tapers are an ancient and pious brotherhood. Our order is founded on that brilliant star, which the Lord God kindled once to lead the wise men from the East to the Saviour's birth-place. So we too beam forth into the night, for we would, like that star of old, guide human beings to the source of salvation. But what can you know—nocturnal rabble of the forest? You Owls and Bats, and trees and plants, or even you sparkling Fireflies in your full-dress uniform,

what can you know of the eternal light which shineth in darkness, and of the star which announceth it?"

"Oh! stars?" said the little grasses on the bank. "They often fall into the pool. On clear nights, when the cloud-curtain is rolled away, they rest glittering here on the surface of the water; but they are silent and mysterious. We cannot converse with them, and, in fact, we do not understand their language. They talk in light."

On the slope there stood a huge and vigorous oak-tree, which had sent its roots down deep among the rocks, and held its broad majestic head yet higher than the old maple under which the young traveller was reclining. Its stem was densely clothed with trails of ivy, which wound themselves confidingly around the mighty tree, clasping its rugged bark in their feeble leafy embrace. With a



Its stem was densely clothed with trails of Ivy.

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gentle hand the ivy now touched the grass at its feet, and asked softly—

“Did you *wish* to understand the stars, you little Grasses? A really earnest good will helps one much. Look not merely right before you on the ground, little Grasses; stretch yourselves up, and when you see something below which glitters and shines all gloriously, like the stars here in the water, then raise your eyes and look aloft at the real brilliant light of which the lustre down below is but the reflection. To *wish* to understand, and then to look upwards, little Grasses, *that* makes the vision clear and opens the portals of truth.”

“Portals of truth!” grumbled Professor Owl. “He preaches and teaches, and yet what a poor philosopher he is, after all!”

But the Will-o'-the-Wisp exclaimed,—

“God bless you, you dear Ivy-trail! Be

“That must have been a blaze,” cried the Fireflies, “if the others burned as brilliantly as yourself!”

“Yes, afterwards; but at first I alone was burning — only I! From a branch which stretched out above her head, I lighted the lady as she went to and fro, spreading out upon the tables gifts, such as loving human beings give one another at Christmas-tide. Right under me were laid out boys’ clothes, toys, and picture-books; and here the young house-wife seemed to have the most to arrange. I can see and hear her still!

“‘Here, especially, everything must look home-like and cheerful,’ said she to the servant-maid who stood admiringly by. . . . Why did her bright eyes look sad, as she half concealed a little jacket of black woollen stuff under toys and sweetmeats?

“‘My hands were willing to do a motherly

work for my new child ; but I could only use black silk to embroider his jacket with,' continued she, sighing.

“ Restless and agitated, she went from one table to another, looked often at the clock, and read over again a letter which she had gone through many times already.

“ ‘ Tick-tack, tick-tack,’ said the old Time-piece on the wall, as she sat in comfortable self-complacency on a wide bracket, defiantly pressing her short gilded feet against the dark marble slab. Her round, full-moon visage looked out from under her old-fashioned head-dress adorned with spiral flourishes, as listlessly — and she swung the pendulum, which ornamented her bosom like the badge of some order, as deliberately—as if it did not matter at all to her what hour she was on the point of proclaiming with her jarring voice.”

“Well, it looked very lovely. I looked down at it from my branch when the young mother went over to it to listen, and drew aside the curtain as she bent over it. The little head, which was turned towards me, rested on a snow-white pillow; the little mouth was slightly open, the cheeks, flushed with sleep, were shaded by long dark silken lashes. A pearly dew stood on the babe’s temples, and moistened the flaxen hair which had escaped from its little cap. One of its tiny hands rested on the counterpane, the other was thrown back above its head and tightly closed. A wondrously sweet little Christmas-doll it was! The mother’s hand moved as if to stroke the little round face, but she did not touch it; she only let the child’s warm breath play through her fingers. She smoothed down the coverlet, and, as she arranged the folds of the



Drew aside the curtain as she bent over it.



curtain, a soft 'God bless her!' escaped her lips."

"Did you not see the eyes?" asked the Water-lily. "The eyes are the chief thing."

"Ah, how wise you are!" said the young Owlet; and the little Flame continued.

"The eyes were asleep; and if the young mother had only gone to look *once* at her child, I should not be able to tell you anything about them. But she did so often; and at last, as she went to show the maid-servant how quietly and soundly the little creature was sleeping,—and as she drew the curtain carefully and gently—quite gently—there shone upon her two beaming dark-blue stars; the little limbs stretched themselves contentedly, and the little mouth relaxed into a smile. I heard a tone of exultation in the mother's clear voice. 'Is she not sweet? Is there anything equal to her?' she

murmured joyfully, and tears of happiness shone in her eyes. Oh! what a pleasure it is for Christmas Tapers to see themselves shine, reflected back from happy human eyes! And especially when the eyes are those of children; so innocent—beaming with such joy, and yet so deep and earnest; like those the little infant yonder in the cradle opened at that moment.”

Then the Ivy-trail said,—

“It is because a soul dwells in human eyes, and a light beams forth from them clearer and better than that of any taper, that you Christmas Candles yearn to look into them. Light attracts light. In children’s eyes there dwells the purest lustre. But best of all is it when childlike eyes beam from an aged face, and childlike joy beats in an aged human heart.”

A long discordant hoot was heard at this from the old Owl, who shook his head con-

temptuously, and with his sharp claws scraped impatiently at the great stone which he had chosen for a seat.

The Will-o'-the-Wisp then went on to tell how the crack of a whip, the noise of wheels, and the joyful barking of a dog were heard from the courtyard outside, and how the lady ran to the window, and the maid to the door, exclaiming, "The Master! the Master! There is the Master!"

"The young mother," continued the little Flame, "quickly caught up her child from the cradle, wrapped it carefully in a warm shawl, and flew to the door. But on the threshold she gave the child to the servant, saying hastily, 'No, no, you must carry her; I must have both arms free to receive my new child into them.'

"Through the brightly-lighted hall they went, and down the staircase; the doors

closed behind them and I,—I was alone—
alone in the big room.

“With horror I became aware how low I had already burned. I was scarcely half the height of my unlighted brethren around me. Were my watching and experience all to come to an end so soon? thought I, and I held my breath and made my flame as small as possible, in order to save up my wax. I drew a dark cap of ashes and burnt wick on to my head, but it would not stay there; it fell to the ground, and would probably have burned a hole in the carpet, if the maid had not come in just then and stamped it out.

“Next, an old serving-man came and lighted the many tapers on the chandelier and on the walls; and they sat stiff and upright in their snow-white garments, and looked down proudly upon us. But all the brethren

on the fir-branches had their turn too ; and I could behold the tree in the great mirror, glittering and gleaming as if it had put on a dress of gold and sunshine. And again the serving-man and the maid-servant spoke of a boy :—‘The poor boy,’ they said—‘but what an air of refinement and distinction he had, and how good he looked. Yes ; and he must be good too, for otherwise the grave woman, who had been his nurse, would have cared more for the little brother, who needed her care more,—but it was from *this* one that she could not bear to be parted.’—So they said.

“And now all was bright and ready, and the servants withdrew. Then was heard the tread of many feet ascending the staircase from the hall. The notes of a beautiful Christmas Carol sounded from the next room, and then—the doors were flung open !”

“ Ah! if one could be but a Fir-tree!” exclaimed a little sprig of Thyme.

“ Be quiet! Do not interrupt!” sounded from all sides,—and the Will-o'-the-Wisp continued: “ I saw the company on the threshold surrounded by all the household and servants. I saw the Master of the house, still in his travelling-dress; he was carrying his little daughter, who was shouting aloud and striking the air with hands and feet, as she strove to reach the Christmas Tree.

“ The young wife led by the hand a boy in mourning, on whom she looked lovingly down. The boy had seized her right hand in both of his. Pressing his ruffled brown curls against her arm, he raised to her face, eyes of joyful expectation and eagerness. I flickered up so that the wax flowed down from my wick in scalding drops. I wanted to see

everything—everything at once—and yet I was so short!

“Across the tree, over my head, hung a long net of gilt paper which held a rosy apple. Oh, rapture! a golden ladder for little glimmering flames! I swung myself up from mesh to mesh; the steps of my ladder turned to tinder under my fiery tread;—the apple rolled to the ground; and, as I flared up joyfully, a magnificent cloud of smoke curled above my head! But suddenly there came a hand which tore me down.—I was thrown on the ground and stamped out.—I have no more to relate;—my life was over.”

“Oh! what a pity!” said the Water-lily, regretfully. “If only you had left climbing alone, then the story might have been a little bit longer.”

“Every Will-o'-the-Wisp can tell you something,” replied the little Flame; “you can ask

the others." And therewith he hopped glimmeringly to the right and then to the left.

A Firefly flew after him and asked eagerly, "Did not those Honey-cakes tell you anything about the Queen Bee who gave the ball to-day? Or about her Grandmother, that most gracious Lady of blessèd Memory? Honey-cakes generally have tolerably confidential relations with the aristocracy of the beehive."

But the Flame had disappeared, as if extinguished by the night air, and the Firefly had to do without an answer.

CHAPTER V.

The Spirit of the Lamp.—The Schoolroom Lamp and the Flaring Flames.—Ulrich and Hannah.—How Fire-Puck plotted mischief; and what came of it.

“Do ask the other Will-o’-the-Wisps,” exclaimed the young Owlet; and, as the Water-lily was very anxious to hear more, the Fire-flies flew hither and thither, and invited the wandering Lights to come close to the bank and tell the histories of their lives.

One little Flame, much fuller and broader than the first, and with a steady lustre, glided, circling slowly forth from the background of the morass. He often lingered and stopped, seeming doubtful whether to advance to the bank or not.

The Fireflies grew impatient and exclaimed peremptorily: "Now then, Will-o'-the-Wisp! let us have no coyness here:—Come along nearer and out with it! We want to have the story of your life."

But they had made a fine mistake! The little Flame drew himself up haughtily, sent high up into the air a lengthened beam of reddish yellow light, slender as the stem of a bulrush,—contemptuously puffed out thick clouds of smoke, and turned back in a twinkling. Not another earthly word would Owl or Insect have been able to prevail upon him to utter; but the Water-lily movingly entreated him, in a sweet and plaintive voice, to speak, and added,—“You are certainly the very best of all the Will-o'-the-Wisps! Not one of the others can possibly know so pretty a story as yours.”

This seemed to please the little Flame, who





You are certainly the very best of all the Will-o'-the Wispes!

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described narrower circles as he drew near once more, and at last remained standing a few steps from the bank.

“That is no nimble friendly little Christmas Taper,” whispered the Bat, who was hanging, with outspread wings, from the blasted Oak-tree, on a branch of which the young Owlet had placed herself,—“that one has probably burned on some poor Candlestick; and the Snuffers have not kept it under sufficiently strict discipline.”

“*I* burn on a Candlestick! *I* allow myself to be snipped by the Snuffers!” exclaimed the Will-o'-the-Wisp, who had very quick hearing: “What absurdity! I dwelt under an opal-white dome, and a little transparent tower protected me from my sworn enemy the Draught. The lamp which supported me was hung by long cords from the ceiling. There I sat on a soft wick, in the highest

place in the room, and shed my light on all around, and reigned over everything."

"*You* reigned over everything?" laughed the young Owlet,—“Why you were a prisoner yourself, shut up in a narrow tower!”

“Oh, my glass tower was no prison. Do you call those prison-walls which I could have split with one or two hot puffs?” exclaimed the Will-o'-the-Wisp; and again he sent up on high the slender reddish-yellow beam and thick smoke—“Piff—Paff!”

“Ah! Please do not make all that smoke,” entreated Miss Owlet, as she hid her beak under her wing; “it makes my head ache.”

The little Flame sputtered mockingly; and when the Water-lily asked, “Did you then burst your bright little tower?” he continued,—“I let it stand; I spared my bright little tower. Oh! I was prudent; I should have caught my death of cold from the Draught.

November storms were raging round the house, —howling in the chimney—rattling the stove-doors outside in the entrance-hall. The storm-hunted Rain-fairies were rushing by in their wild fright, beating and lashing at the window with their wet veils. They pressed longingly against the shining panes, but they could not remain there,—they slipped off, and fell with a pitiful plash from the window-sill, down the steep walls, on to the stone pavement of the Court-yard.

“The heavy tassels of the window-curtain were having a little dance on the sly, while the Draught played for them. He pushed in through the smallest crevices, and even beat with his bold fist against the chamber-door. My lamp, too, was gently stirred by him ; but I laughed at all his frenzy, there in the security of the room. The house was firmly built of hewn stone ; and just in the corner,

where the long wing joins the main building, there lay sheltered the cosy chamber,—illuminated and filled with my light. All around, below me, was my silent kingdom ; and there was I bearing rule ; *I*, watching over all with my clear eyes !

“My wild kinsmen in the iron stove—the Firebrands and the Flaring Flames—have borne me a grudge from of old. They hate quiet lamp-light,—boast of having their own brilliancy, and burn with whimsical distorted flashes. They were shedding a blood-red glow over the room as they sputtered and crackled and scoffed at me. They breathed through the whole chamber a warmth which rose, wave upon wave, up to me : wherever I shone there I felt it.

“‘High and mighty Light,’ hissed the Flames in the stove—

'How thou shin'st to-night !
Thou art fed on oil,
Which thy wick doth spoil :—
If the oil runs dry
Thou wilt surely die.
If thy wick's not long
Soon will end our song.
Merry Draught, give one blow,
Out thou'lt go ! out thou'lt go !'

hissed the Flames while I looked haughtily down upon them, and showed my contempt by occasional puffs of smoke."

"If you bore rule in the room, you ought to have punished them," exclaimed the Fireflies.

"Pouf ! I scorned to do that," said the Will-o'-the-Wisp ; "but for all that I was the Ruler. The House-Mother would never have confided the children to the savage Flames ; but she left them under MY protection when she went out. Those children—the joy and delight of the house,—what care I took of them !

anxiously shining and watching over them,—
pouring down upon them my soft light. I
showed the little girl at the doll's cradle that
her 'Lisbeth' was not yet asleep. She settled
herself on her footstool and began to sing a
lullaby about 'black sheep and white sheep.'
At the round table in the middle of the room,
right under me, sat the boy with lesson-
books and copy-books spread out around
him. I helped him to write his *Analekta*
Hellenika."

"Ah! what a barbarous word!" sighed the
Water-lily. "Is it fitting to speak of such
things before white blossoms?"

The young Owl flirted her wings com-
passionately, murmuring something about
'prudery,' and 'children's narrow-minded-
ness,' while the old Forest Trees shook their
heads with a rustle; for even to them the
expression was displeasing, and they knew as

little as the gentle Water-flower what to make of it. But the listening boy under the Maple-tree laughed aloud, rubbed his hands for joy, and looked more cheerful than he had done the whole evening.

A Firefly asked, "Where did you learn that queer word, you Will-o'-the-Wisp-o'-the-Lamp?"

"He who is Light, and looks around him brightly, does not need to *learn*. We Lights know and understand all that we illumine, and *I* especially so! The boy was tracing the curious characters, with their little hooks, their little tails, and their flourishes; and I gave him light for it. He used that word when the little girl came to the table and looked at his book, asking, in wonder, what he was doing there. 'Writing ought not to look like that,' said she.

"Then he said that word, and laughed at

the little one, for talking of writing, which she knew nothing about.

“‘But I can write myself—just a very little bit,’ said the child; ‘I can make *oughts* and *ones*.’

“‘Ah! how clever you are!’ answered the boy. ‘I suppose you can read too?’ And he took a sheet of paper, wrote a word upon it, and gave it to the little one.

“‘That’s *Me!*’ exclaimed she gleefully. ‘Hannah, that is;—Hannah,—just as you have written it in my pretty picture-book.’”

“Was it a brother and a little sister?” asked the Rush-flowers.

“Settle that yourselves,” said the Will-o’-the-Wisp. “This is what they were like:—the boy tall and strong, with earnest dark brown eyes which shone with a courageous light. His soft boyish lips were firmly closed. His dark hair fell in rich waves over his brow.

The tender little girl, half his size, was a graceful elf-like little maid, who looked like a snow-white blossom ; her blue eyes were full of sweet roguishness, and were shaded by long dark lashes. Her golden hair lay smooth above her temples, and was plaited and coiled round at the back of her head. Would brother and sister look like that ? ”

“ Yes, truly,” exclaimed the little Daisy,—
“ Dark and fair, make a charming pair.”

Then the Bat inquired,—

“ Didn’t he tease her ? Brothers always like to tease their little sisters.”

“ Pouf ! ” said the Will-o’-the-Wisp. “ The little girl was playing with apples which the Mother had left for the children’s supper. She rolled them across the table, arranged them in pairs, and then in a circle. The boy looked at the little thing with a bright smile, but without speaking. At length she put

all the apples back into the basket, which she pushed on to the table as far as her little arms could reach.

“‘We may eat them when your work is done — but not before; mamma said so,’ announced the child, and she stood waiting.

“She leaned her arms on the table, and rested her chin on both her hands. What a charming little creature she was! Her delicate limbs, the tender, clear-cut features of her sweet little face, and the golden plaits of her hair, shining in the full brilliancy of my brightest rays! A warm glow overspread her face—a fitful flush like what the Flaring Flames would throw. But it was not the Fire-light which fell on the child there, in the midst of my radiant circle. No, no; it was the reflection of something else. The young life that throbbed in the

little one's heart breathed forth that rosy flush;—impatience, longing for the apples—these dyed her cheeks deeper and deeper. There was a little cloud of discontent upon her brow, a tear stood on the long lashes, which held it fast and would not let it drop. 'Ulrich, you are a very long time!' said the child. Then the boy looked up."

"Aha!" said the Bat, "now it's coming! Now, like a true brother, he will put the apples on the highest cupboard, or fill his pockets with them, and laugh at the little sister."

"Bats may know a great deal about what goes on in the world," suggested a Fire-fly, "but when a Will-o'-the-Wisp is in the midst of telling a story, I should have thought—"

"Bats," interrupted the Young Owlet pertly, "have, at the best of times, only a dim and

glimmering conception of the world and of human beings."

"Ah, yes! Just so," said the Firefly, turning with a low bow towards Miss Owlet.

The little Flame remarked,—

"It is a great pity that nocturnal winged creatures *will* chatter while Light is speaking. The boy behaved quite differently. He pitied the little child, and said that, as he had a great deal to do that evening, she might eat her apples, and he would explain matters to the Mother. But the little one tried to look contented, and replied quickly,—'No, no; I would rather wait too. Do you think I *can't* wait, Ulrich?'

"Then the boy looked at her with an arch smile, as he took out of the basket a fine round apple, which he held towards her without saying a word. I looked at her too, the pretty little creature; I gazed into her



Took out of the basket a fine round apple, which he held towards her.

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face with my clear light. Then I saw her cheeks grow redder and redder, till they glowed as ruddy as those of the apple. The flush spread to her brow, and she bent her little head quite low as if ashamed. The smooth rosy apple bore deep marks of two rows of little teeth, which had bitten sharply into it. The child began very softly to say she had not really wanted to bite a piece off; but that was the most beautiful of all the apples, and she had only given it a kiss. 'Ah!' exclaimed the boy, and laughed aloud, 'then people must beware of your kisses. I must tell the Father what sharp teeth his little girl has got.'

"'Oh, how naughty you are, Ulrich!'" cried the child; and she sat herself down on her little chair in the corner, and began to pout.

"The blustering wind howled in the chimney. The stove-doors outside clattered

without ceasing. The wild flames in the stove were making the maddest noise—all talking at once. I felt quite hot at their evil speeches and jests. But the children got no harm from them, for they did not understand the crackling chatter.

“Little Fire-Puck, the Spirit of the Sparks, who dwells in pine-shavings and damp Alder-logs, and wherever he can burn, in chimneys or on open hearths, likes to spring out among human beings, to frighten them with a crack and a bang—he was the loudest of them all.

“‘Knick! knack!’ he jumped up and down in the stove, making game of the little girl, and calling her an Apple-sparrow. The savage Flame-Streamer, with his long red tongue, had already darted from the open stove-door two or three times, and I became very anxious about the children, for he is really dangerous. He is the offspring of demons, and does not

wish well to human beings. He has lighted up funeral piles where poor martyrs have died painful deaths for their belief. Oh! it is dreadful to think of what he could tell!

“The little girl had turned her head, and was watching the crackling fire. ‘How merry it is!’ she whispered to herself.

“A magnificent idea lighted up her eyes. She ran quickly to the table, took one apple after another, and put them all in her little pinafore. ‘I will not eat them, really, Ulrich. Please, please don’t look round. You will be so pleased by-and-bye with what I am going to do with them.’

“Then I saw the child go busily to her doll’s cupboard, where the little china dishes were all ranged, and then stand up on her little chair in front of the stove. She had put each apple upon a little dish, and placed them all on the hot iron plate. So she stood

watching her apples while I watched over her. Oh! it was well that I was there. The warmth of the stove and the joy of expectation made her cheeks glow more and more brightly; her plaits had come unfastened, and hung far down her back. She put out her white arm, and touched the apples with one little finger, to feel if they were yet hot enough.

“ ‘Ho, ho! Baked Apples!’ cried little Fire-Puck in the stove. ‘Nought shall come of that. Piff! paff! they shall burn and they shall burst! Knick! knack.’

“Flames issued once more through the stove-door, and threw a dazzling glare upon the child’s foot, and upon her little frock.”

“Listen, Will-o'-the-Wisp-o'-the-Lamp,” interrupted a Firefly. “Now was the time for you to do your duty as care-taker, and to protect the child. What did you do now, you



“ Ho, ho ! Baked Apples ! ” cried little Fire-Fuck in the Stove.

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radiant, illustrious Ruler-of-the-Chamber, and Protector of the Children ?”

“ Oh, how I sputtered to warn them ! and fumed till my breath was nearly gone ! But, if children *will not* hear ? . . . Once the boy looked up at me and said shortly, ‘ Are you gone daft, you old lamp ? Must you too puff and pant whenever the Storm-wind holds a concert ? It is nothing to *you* ! Sit still up there, that I may write in peace !’

“ The little one at the stove did not once look round at me. ‘ Stretch yourself out, and burn her, burn her !’ hissed the Flames. ‘ So pretty and white ! Scorch her ! Burn her black ! Burn her, burn her !’ they hissed ever more and more boldly, as they leaned out at the stove-door. The Draught beat them back for a while ; but a violent gust of wind just then blustered furiously down the chimney, and rushed wildly around the

stove, so that the Flames had to cringe and flee into corners ; but the Flame-streamer with the long red tongue pushed his way forcibly through the iron door ; he seized the child's thin pinafore, which fluttered loosely from its fastenings on her shoulder, and grasped greedily at her golden plaits. The child shrieked out in terror, the boy sprang to his feet, while a low cry of horror escaped him.

“ He seizes the burning child, tears off her pinafore, and crushes out the flames. Her hair, up which the crackling sparks and flames are leaping, he draws through his fingers. A little bit of the pretty plait, with a half-burned ribbon on it, remains in his hand.

“ And now the little one is resting in the easy-chair whither the boy has carried her ; and he kneels before her, drying her

tears, feeling her arms and neck, and speaking gentle, comforting words, while heavy drops roll down his own cheeks, white with terror.

“There are the parents! Even through the roar of the wind, their child’s cry of fear had reached their ears. The little one sprang forward to meet them, and threw herself into her mother’s arms. ‘Dear, dear Mamma, do not be angry—please! I am only a little bit burned. It does not hurt very much.’

“The mother seated herself in the easy-chair, holding the little girl on her lap, and smoothing down the little frock, whose thick woollen material had protected her; a wee little red spot on the shoulder and another on the elbow;—that was all the hurt she had got. The little creature said merrily: ‘What a good thing it was that I had not on my new pinafore,’ and told how Ulrich

had seized the flames, and torn them off her, and crushed them all out.

“The father folded the boy tenderly to his breast. The mother pressed his hand, with tears in her eyes. She saw him wince with pain—saw that he had wrapped a handkerchief round his hand—and, as she took it off, she turned pale.

“I watched them from my lamp on high, as they led the boy away. The mother’s hand rested fondly on his shoulder, the father was carrying the little girl. I remained alone. I was sorry that I had not been able to help, and that the children had not listened to my warnings. I felt no more pleasure in shining, and watched the savage flames who had done the mischief, as one after another they sank to rest. The Spark-spirits, too, had jumped till they were weary, and now crept lazily through the ashes: only

the wind still howled as loudly as ever, round the house.

“The Rain-fairies had rustled away, the moonbeams fell through rifts in the clouds right into the room. The young housemaid came in, shut the stove, and raised her arm towards my Lamp. She twisted my wick round and round until my head swam, and—my life was at an end!”

“It was a good thing, though, that *you* were there, Will-o'-the-Wisp-o'-the-Lamp, and bore rule too!” sneered a Firefly. But the Will-o'-the-Wisp was extinguished.

“The poor boy!” sighed the Water-lily. “What might not the cruel Fire-Flames have done to him!”

CHAPTER VI.

The Spirit of the Kettle-lamp.—How, twenty years ago, a Kettle helped the enjoyment of a Present, blessed in memories of the Past and dreams of the Future; and how the "Principal Persons" comported themselves.

ANOTHER Will-o'-the-Wisp whirled towards them, more transparent than the rest. As he gleamed with a blueish light on the bank, jumped up and down, and wheeled around in flickering circles, a low sound of singing came through the air, soft and monotonous as a lullaby.

"Who is that singing?" asked the Owl.
"What does that whining mean? Have we a Nursemaid here?"

"Oh! do let him alone," entreated the

Water-lily; and the little Flame on the bank laughed aloud, jumped, and whirled about, and tried to speak, but, between laughing and jumping, could not get out a word.

“It is a Water-sprite,” tittered he at last; “a little Water-sprite, who is singing to welcome me. There must be some sweet little rock-spring running into the Pool, which has recognized me, and now it is singing me my own song; the song that all Spirits of the Springs strike up when I approach and make them bubble up by breathing upon them with my hot breath.

“Hurrah! what fun!—what a merry life that was under the singing Kettle! Dancing in my little home: always dancing to the same sweet tune: leaping, and thrusting out my tongue! With humming and hissing above me, and wreaths of damp blueish vapour, through which I peeped out over the edge of

my saucer,—my flicker reflected in the shining silver plate, in the clear crystal, and in the coloured cups on the white damask tablecloth. The room was a bright and comfortable one, with dark hangings of rich drapery, and its ceiling was ornamented with stucco and gilding. On the waxed oaken doors were great round knobs which shone and glittered. ‘Are those lights?’ thought I. I nodded to them,—put out my tongue,—and winked in a friendly manner. They stared coldly at me,—pah!—contemptible furbished-up brass!

“How the parquetted floors shone! How bright were the monstrous flowers on the carpet! Happy human beings live like this; and happy human beings love and cherish the merry contented House-Spirit; the little Flame under the Tea-Kettle, who leaps and capers, whose breath is fire, and whose pulses beat hotly, restlessly, sharply ever!

“For him they deck each evening a certain spot on the round family table. Then they enjoy refined and cheerful talk and pleasantries; while the hot moist steam arises, while the Kettle chirps, and hisses, and hums, and the little Flame laughs and puts out his tongue.”

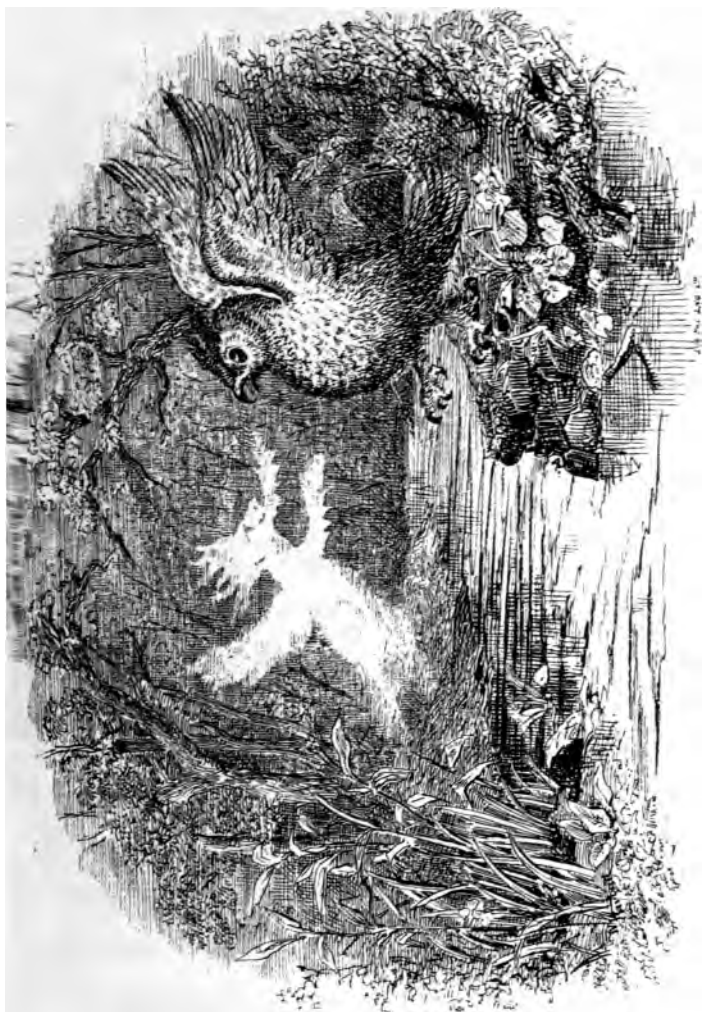
“Oh! stop, stop!” entreated a Firefly. “Rest a moment, you pointed, flickering thing! You take my breath away with your jumping and chattering.”

“Have you *no* breath left?” asked the Will-o'-the-Wisp, laughing. “Come, dance with me, you bright little fellow! Say, have I not breath for us both? Come, come; you are a gallant Cavalier!” Quick as the wind he whirled along the bank, and reached the stone where the old Owl was sitting. “Look, *there* are the brass knobs!” he cried merrily, darting out his tongue of flickering flame towards the Professor's great spectacled

eyes. "Contemptible brass! No light in it, and no soul!"

The old bird, dazzled and irritated, screeched aloud, flapped his wings, and pecked at the saucy Will-o'-the-Wisp with his beak. But he had departed again by that time to the other side of the little creek, and the Ivy-trail called after him: "It must be long since you burned in human company, you unruly thing! That which good human beings loved and cherished does not fly glittering around like a mad spiteful Kobold at night, playing pranks on respectable old birds."

"Lirum! Larum! Long ago! long ago!" sang the little Light. "Is twenty years long ago? Ha, ha, ha! Yes,—twenty years ago and more,—the Kettle chirped its watery song; there I sat, and there I burned, on that one blissful evening!"



Like a mud spickful Kobold playing pranks on respectable old birds.

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“Why was it such a blissful evening?”
asked the little Grasses.

“Because I was so happy—Hurrah! I and the human beings. You should have seen the joyful faces round me at the tea-table. Ah! even the pale cheek of the House-Mother in the sofa-corner was bright with gladness. And how the Father’s eyes shone! He sat contentedly in the wide easy-chair and blew cheering clouds from his pipe.”

“There was a Father there, too?”

“Of course. There were He and She.”

“He and She!—ah! only two!” sighed the little Grasses.

“But who was He, and who was She?”
asked the Water-lily.

“Patience, patience; wait a little! I saw more than these. A girlish head,—dark-blue childlike eyes, full of glee and roguishness. Then the long lashes drooped, and when

she looked up again there was deep thought — earnest inquiry — in those dark eyes.”

“ She sat at your tea-table ? ”

“ She sat at my tea-table, and held in her slender hand a silver knife, with which she spread butter on the loaf off which the Youth helped her to cut slices.”

“ The Youth ! Ah, merry Will-o'-the-Wisp, keep still one moment. A youth, too ? Who was the youth, then ? ”

“ Ha, ha ! You want to know that ! The youth was the principal person. He was the joy ! He had been away for a long long time, and was now returned. He had come home to-day from his distant journeying. For him was burning the little domestic Flame under the singing Kettle. For him beat the hearts and beamed the eyes.”

“ Tell us how he behaved ? ” asked the

young Owlet. "It is not unimportant to know how *principal persons* comport themselves."

"Ah, well!" exclaimed the Light, "that is very unimportant to the principal persons themselves:—My dear youth did not think about comporting himself. He sat and gazed at the young girl,—at her hands,—at her lovely face. When she moved round the table with her light step, he followed her with his eyes,—earnestly and thoughtfully,—as if she were some sweet problem which he would fain solve."

"But what are Problems?" asked the Water-lily.

"*Buds* are problems!" interrupted the Ivy-trail. "First, a young plant, small, humble, thickly veiled with crinkled green leaves. Then the stalk arises, higher and higher, and at length there hangs, rocked on

the slender stem, the swelling, beauteous bud. You stand before it, asking, 'What will it be to-morrow, as a full-blown flower, gorgeous in colour and brightness, breathing forth fragrant odour?' Sunshine and the warm summer air can solve such flower problems."

"Ha! bravo! bravo!" laughed the little Flame, waving a merry flicker of applause across to the Ivy-trail. "That's true; so she was; a graceful maiden bud in the spring-time of its life,—growing,—developing. 'What will she be in her full bloom?' That was the question which shone in the Youth's earnest dark eyes. Ah! I understood him quite well. He was dreaming thoughtfully about the little bud hid in crinkled green leaves."

"Was he a dreamer then?" asked the young Owlet.

“By no means; he was a thinker,” said the Flame. “Studious, learned,—even a theologian, and I know not what besides! No book was too ancient, too bulky, or too grave for him. None was too firmly sealed by its foreign language or the depth of its philosophy. But he did not know,—good simple youth,—that children’s shoes grow old and wear out.”

“Didn’t he know *that*?” cried the little Daisy, drawing herself up to her full height.

“Indeed,” said the Will-o'-the-Wisp, laughing, “he who prefers the company of the Church Fathers, and wherever he goes takes an interest in old books, and not in young people, how should such an one comprehend what three or four years would make of a little playfellow? Thoughts which are continually wandering in bygone centuries

are not quick to feel themselves at home in the blessed Present. A blessed and delightful Present that was,—Hurrah !”

And thereupon the little Flame spun round and round ; flickering, and singing, and jumping so wildly over the meadow, that sparks flew on all sides, and the Water-lily began to fear there would be no more story.

Professor Owl meanwhile opened his beak and said : “ You must have been a student yourself, you saucy spring-heeled Jack, you know so much about your beloved Youth, and speak of him as if he had been one of your brethren, who vexed you by his gravity.”

“ Ho, ho ! I a Student ? and pray why not a Professor into the bargain ? I should not be the first Will-o'-the-Wisp who had attained to such a dignity. *I* to sit on a school form ! *I* to write in thick copy-books !

Ha ha!—Ha ha! The Tea-table was *my* lecture-room; and what I know I learned by listening to what was said there.”

“Did your grave Youth speak?” asked the Water-lily. “Ah, do tell us what he said.”

“A great great deal! Much more than it would do you any good to hear. About travelling, and England, whence he had just returned. About the brother whom he had visited there, about the Uncle, and Aunt, and Cousins.”

“About nothing else?” sighed the Water-lily, scarcely above her breath.

“Oh, yes,” said the little Flame, reflectively. “He had once known a little girl, of whom he had been very, very fond, and to whom he had been a faithful playfellow. She had learned many useful things from him—to skip, to trundle a hoop, to walk on stilts, and, when

he took leave of her, she had jumped upon the garden-seat, so as to reach up to the big brother. He told her all about that."

"Who was the little girl, then? Where was the garden?—and the seat?" cried the little Grasses and the Thyme-blossoms all at once.

Quick as thought the Light sprang into the midst of them, seized the Grasses and little Plants by their slender leaves, and shook them well, as he flashed out vehemently: "Will you be quiet? Will you wait? Can I know everything! Was *I* there?"

The little Grasses and Plants could see quite well that the Flame was not really very angry, though he flared up so wildly. They laughed and said they wanted so much to hear about the little girl.

"Be quiet, then!" exclaimed the little Flame. "Listen to what the Youth said,—

first about taking leave at the garden-seat,—and then about his return. He said he could not find the child again—the little Sister. But here was an elegant womanly form, in a long dress, speaking sedately to the servants: ruling like a discreet house-wife over the spoons, and cups, and plates, here at the tea-table. This was so new and strange, he kept on fancying that the Chrysalis would open, and his little Sister would flutter out, and jump up on his knee.”

“The poor Youth longed for his little Sister,” said the Water-lily.

The Will-o'-the-Wisp laughed. “Believe it of him!” cried he; “believe it of him if it amuses you! *I* didn't believe it! Longing makes one pale. The rogue!—he looked so happy. His dark eyes sparkled with light and joy; his grave mouth was smiling as if smiles had been invented on purpose for him.

The young girl sprang up quickly : She ' will not be new and strange,' cried she."

" The little girl of the garden-seat ? "

" The maiden bud, I mean, who was spreading bread and butter. And then she sat herself down on the footstool by her mother, leaned her head, with its thick plaits of hair, against the sofa, looked archly up into the Youth's face, and asked—' Now, am I the old, the dear old little Hannah ? ' "

" Had she shining golden plaits ? " asked a Rush-flower suddenly.

" Tied up with ribbon-bows ? " This question was added by the little Daisy.

" He ! he ! he ! " tittered the Light, whirling round and round, and thrusting out his tongue. " That's all wrong ! You've missed the mark ! *Brown* plaits ; *No* ribbons. But wait,—wait a bit ; how was it ? " and the little Flame rocked itself from side to side, and

humming monotonously, thus slowly continued :
“ Ah, yes ; ah, yes ; it was in this way. The Youth stroked the Maiden’s hair with his hand, and spoke thoughtfully ; he said her hair had grown so dark, it was quite a different colour. But only at the ends ; on her forehead there was still a little of the old golden gleam ; it must have been false gold though (he said) to keep its colour so badly.”

“ False gold ! how ungallant !” cried a Firefly ; “ did the little one take it ill ? ”

“ No, indeed ! ” exclaimed the Light. “ The tender child, the sweet little one, begged that he would respect her smoothly-combed maiden tresses. Such delicate things must be carefully handled ; and therewith she took his hand, and held it fast in both of hers. I peeped out of my little lamp, I flickered up, and looked over the tiny thing that hardly deserved to be called a cream-ewer.

And I saw on the Youth's hand, alas ! a great, great scar. The charming Hannah saw it too, and stroked it caressingly with her white fingers. Ah ! there was an end to her joyous laughter ! All at once it died away. She bent her head over the scarred hand, and said quite softly : ' Poor, dear Ulrich ! you have brought home the wicked old scar with you ; you must needs bear the penalty of my misdeed ; and yet you were my deliverer from the raging flames, and were deserving of a royal reward ! '

" Ah me ! " sighed the Water-lily ; and the Rush-flowers repeated : " Deliverer from the raging flames ! — the raging flames ! " and assumed a very wise and knowing air.

" *I* know something about Flickering Flames and Firebrands ! " exclaimed the little Daisy.

" Pah ! childish nonsense ! " said the Will-o'-the-Wisp, laughing. " Don't chatter so.

You put everything out of my head! It all flickers, and leaps, and buzzes through my brains. You want to know what else happened. The Father spoke,—oh, such puzzling words! I could not understand what he was talking about! He said it was time to think of Ulrich's reward; dear little Hannah might well hold fast the strong hand which had protected her so well, and might consider—only think!—she might consider for two years, what she would bestow upon Ulrich. Perhaps a rare medallion—a chain of honour,—or, best of all, a little golden finger-ring, suggested the father; for it would be fitting that the very hand which had suffered so much on her behalf should receive the reward.”

Professor Owl inquired, “Did the daughter agree to that?”

“The little one?” said the Will-o'-the-Wisp.
“Ah! she laughed merrily—‘O Daddy! gold

and trinkets for Ulrich?' and turning up her little nose, she added sagely: 'No; to begin with, if I *had* any chains and rings, I'd take care to keep them for myself. They would suit me better than they would His Reverence the future Provost!'"

"Well, and the Youth?" asked the Owl.

The Flame flickered impatiently. "Go, go! you know enough. There is nothing more to tell about the Youth. He remained silent a long while. As the father spoke of reward and a golden ring, he turned his head quickly, and looked at the father with a bright gleam in his large dark eyes. Then a question arose in them,—doubt,—hope,—dreams of the Future! What was the matter with him? The father smiled kindly on him, the mother looked at him tenderly, and a tear glistened in her eye. A hot blush overspread the Youth's face. In silence he bent his eyes on the ground, and

listened to what the little one was saying to him about a beautiful soft glove which she would give him, lined with silk ; and then the scar would have fine times !

“ Oh ! who could understand what they all thought, and felt, and said ? The Kettle sat so heavily on my nose, and chirped and hummed. The steam arose hissing out of it ; blue clouds from the tobacco-pipe flitted restlessly about ; the girl poured the dark yellow beverage out of the silver tea-pot into the cups ; boiling hot fragrance of flowers rose up from it, and mingled with the steam—”

“ Boiling hot fragrance of flowers ? ” screamed the little sprigs of Thyme. “ Oh, Will-o'-the-Wisp, what a fib ! The fragrance of flowers is cool and fresh.”

“ Be quiet !—be quiet ! ” whispered the Ivy-trail. “ Be quiet, little Thyme-blossoms, lest the Camomiles hear you, or the Lime

and Elder-flowers, and punish your impertinence."

The Flame laughed loudly and contemptuously, flickered and danced, and continued—

"Seething hot fragrance of Pekoe blossoms curled about the crystal bowl in which lay shining lumps of snow-white sugar. The fragrance of the tea-flowers blew hotly over the Sugar, breathing forth the gentle question, 'Dost thou still think upon thy native land?—still think of the glowing rays of the torrid zone? Dost thou remember how they beat on the fields of sugar-cane?—how the black hands of negroes cut down the tall stems?—how black hands were the first that tended thee, thou white embodiment of sweetness?' The Sugar remained silent, giving no reply. The Sugar knew right well that the hot rays of the tropic sun had never saluted his mother,—*his* mother who had been a Beet-root!"

“That you must prove, you ultra-clever Will-o'-the-Wisp,” sneered Professor Owl. “Sugar the offspring of Beet-root more than twenty years ago? You must *prove* that **first!**” .

“Well, well,—what do I care?” cried the Flame. “I am tired; I will prove nothing. The Kettle above me was singing such mad melodies, gurgling notes,—comical runs,—and then stopping as if his breath were spent. The Mother made a sign and the Maiden arose quickly, lifted up the Kettle and bent towards me. A warm breath blows over me. ‘Hoho! are there designs upon my life? My life pleases me—I cannot die. No! I will stay here; I like being in cheerful company.’ I leaned back, and fought flickeringly for my life. ‘Art thou blowing at me, thou beauteous child? I fear not thy rosy mouth; I will blow back at thee—Pouf! Take care of

thysel! My breath is hotter than thine!'—
Woe is me! The graceful youth bends forward too. No use in flickering now. He blows hard—blows me out!"

"Alas!" sighed the Water-lily, "if lights are only meant to be extinguished, theirs must be a sorry life!"

The Will-o'-the-Wisp spun round once or twice, thrusting out his tongue. Then he made a bold spring into the air, and—splash! There he lay in the pool—extinguished.

CHAPTER VII.

The Spirit of the Night-light.—The Sick-bed.—The proffered Betrothal.—Medicines avail not.—The Fever-breath.

THERE was another glimmer on the Spectre-field. Not very far from the bank there trembled a small dim light, which glided slowly forward, often stopping to listen anxiously to every sound, every soft breath of air. A feeble voice complained—

“ Oh, woe is me ! These gusts of wind over the damp morass ! Wretched flame that I am, I shall be blown out and destroyed ! ” and the little Light slipped behind a mole-hill and hid himself there.

“ That won't do !—that's no good ! ” exclaimed the Fireflies. “ We want to see and hear you, little Will-o'-the-Wisp. You must come nearer.”

“Have mercy on me!” wailed the Light. “This tearing wind! It will not let me! I cannot,—cannot come!”

“Oh, pray go and help him!” said the Water-lily, turning to the Fireflies, who flew over to the little Light and offered to protect him, if only he would accompany them.

“No, no,” exclaimed the Flame, drawing back with a shudder. “You have wings with which you make a blast. If you will go first, to show me the safest way, then I will follow.”

So this was done. The insects flew to the bank, and the trembling little Flame glided slowly after them. But arrived there he crept away, flickering timidly between the grasses, terrified by every waving stem, and ever seeking a better and more sheltered spot; and when he began to whisper in his thin, weak

voice, the Water-lily complained that she could not catch a single word.

“Can't you swim?” asked the young Owlet.

“Truly I can swim well!” said the little Light. “I used always to swim. But then I was supported by a stiff pasteboard collar, and sat on a bright little seat which had a cork float on each of its three legs.”

“Here is a little boat for you that will do as well,” said the Owlet, as she threw down an acorn-cup from her bough into the water below.

“The tiresome Blue-stocking has actually evolved a sensible idea for once,” said the Firefly to his companion, as he broke off a slender flower-stalk, and seated himself in the acorn-cup, which he rowed cleverly to the bank. There he left it in charge of the blue Forget-me-nots, and flew a little way up the

slope, where the Light was waiting with the other Firefly. Both insects now encouraged the Flame, and showed him how he could glide quite safely down an overhanging bramble into his little boat. Down below, the blue-eyed flowers kindly helped at his embarkation; and there at last sat the little Light in the acorn-cup shrinking affrighted, as the tiny skiff began to move gently along.

The Fireflies had called to a great Night-moth, splendidly winged with bright-coloured velvet, and the Night-moth fluttered along the surface of the water, creating with its wings a soft breeze, which drove forward the boat freighted as it was. The Fireflies flew beside it; they were kind merry creatures, and tried, by all sorts of quips, to make the little Light laugh and forget his fear.

But the Flame sat cowering down, flickering

gently and timidly, and hardly daring to look around him. He was thus convoyed across the creek, until they lay to, close by the Water-lily, where the Fireflies moored the acorn-cup, like a little boat, with a thin grass-stalk, to one of the broad floating leaves, on which they then took their places.

“Poor thing!” said the Water-lily,—“it is all over now. Were you much frightened?”

“I am not used to sea-voyages,” said the Flame in his feeble voice. “My bright little seat was always still. I lived out my life confined in a small, cosy room, within porcelain walls, and under a green shade. No draughts. No noise. A silent sick-room. My pale light shone around in a calm circle, talking in the twilight with the Moonbeams,—the silver Moonbeams.

“Moonlight and quiet peace rested also on

the pale face and silent, languid form of her for whom I painted dreams, and before whose weary eyes I wove my shadowy fancies. She seems to sleep. But is she asleep?—

“The Youth sits on a low seat by the bed, and still holds her feeble hand. How tenderly he had spoken to her,—how beautifully,—about death, and the joy of dying! He had prayed with her until she fell asleep. His dark earnest eyes were full of the light of peace and of the faith which makes it so easy to die. Did not Angels with their white wings float down the Moonbeams which fell into the room? Whence came the light that beamed around the sick woman and the young priest?”

“Is she sleeping still? She stirs. Her lips whisper a name — ‘Hannah!’ She repeats the name often. She is calling her child.

“The youth bends forward. Shall he fetch her daughter?—‘No, No,’ the sick woman smiles and recollects herself. She wishes to be alone with him, for she has much to say to him,—and her time is short.

“‘Must she then really die?’ I ask this anxiously as I look around me. There stand in a half-circle near me, medicine-phials, firmly stoppered, with paper-labels like long white beards. They nod silently in reply to my question.

“‘She has still so much strength,’ I urged. ‘Do but listen to her voice!’

“‘She will die,—not to-day, but soon. She has but a few days more to live!’ Thus sounds the sad reply.

“I listened again to the conversation at the sick-bed. She spoke of parting,—of her husband, her child,—of her Hannah’s unprotected youth.

“The young man looked up quickly.

“‘Hannah’s unprotected youth!—did you say so, beloved mother? Is not the most faithful of fathers left to her?—and—and—is it possible, mother,—can my hopes have entirely misled me? Have you not—has not the father too—Ah! it was perhaps presumptuous to dream of such a thing—chosen *me* to be the guardian of your treasure?’

“The sick woman smiled tenderly through her tears, as she laid her feeble hand on his head, stroked the dark waves of his hair, and smoothed their wayward fall. Then she spoke again. He had indeed rightly understood them. It had for years been her own and the father’s dearest wish to unite him one day, if possible, more nearly to their house and hearts, as the husband of their daughter. So said the mother. But that was all so uncertain still,—so far off; she will never see her daughter

decked with a bridal wreath. So she would like—it was her last earthly wish—it would, she said, make the parting easier to her, if she could first place Hannah's hand in his,—if she could this day receive, in their betrothal, a pledge of the future happiness of her children.”

“Oonk, oo-oonk,” croaked the Frogs in the pool.

“What was that?” asked the little Flame.

“Be quiet down there,” whispered the Water-lily. “We are hearing a story about human beings told here, and you must not interrupt it.”

“The Youth arose,” continued the Light, “and stood upright beside the bed. His breast heaved; his cheeks glowed; he looked at the sick woman, and tried to speak, but turned away in silence, and paced up and down with long strides. Was it my faint glimmering

light which made him look so pale? Do men turn pale before proffered happiness? He had listened to the mother with a glow of rapture; now the signs of a hard struggle were to be seen in his face; he had pressed his lips tightly together; his brow was very pale.

“Then he stood once more by the bed-side and spoke. I could not understand his faltering tones. What! he refuses her?—he refuses his bliss? Yes; if I rightly understood it all. He took both the sick woman’s hands in his, and begged her not to awake her child from her sweet peace by any hasty word,—not to allow Hannah’s childish lips to take a vow to which her heart did not as yet prompt her. He would not pluck an unripe fruit from the tree of life, one that might need the sunshine and the rain of years before it should ripen and fall into his bosom.

“The Youth was indeed greatly moved. The sick woman spoke little—in a feeble voice, whispered low, uneasily, and anxiously. He raised his hand, and I heard him say distinctly: ‘See, dear mother, Hannah’s fiery token is branded here. The hand so consecrated I will never give to another.’”

“Oonk! oo-oonk! oonk!” sounded again from the pool.

“Ah! I am frightened; that sounds so melancholy,” stammered the Flame, trembling so much that his little acorn-cup began to rock like a boat on a stormy sea.

“You may be quite at ease,” said the Water-lily. “The Frogs are old friends of mine; but they take such dismal views of life.”

Again the little Flame composed himself, and continued: “Kneeling by the bed-side, and bending over the sick woman, the Youth spoke of his love and his hope; said how sweet and

lovely Hannah was, whom he hoped one day to win,—how dear to his heart.

“Oh, the mother, the mother! I saw colour come to her cheeks, brightness to her eyes. That must be the glow of health; she will yet live; will yet see the happiness of her children.

“The phials clinked. Again I heard: ‘The flush of death! the fever flush! Hearest thou nought?—seest thou nought? The Fever! the Fever is returning!’

“Alas! alas!—

“The Youth laid his hand upon the sick woman’s forehead, and listened anxiously to her hurried breathing.

“The door opened softly; a light step was heard, and a slender, maidenly form, sweet and delightful as a sunbeam, glided in. A little hand took hold of the bed-curtain, and a soft voice asked: ‘Has my dear mother been asleep?’ The girl’s blue eyes looked anxiously

at the sick woman, and turned with uneasy inquiry to the silent Youth. Then she seated herself on her little chair, and carefully arranged the mother's coverlet. . . . Alack! *there* it flies!" screamed the little Flame. "Did ye not see it?"

"What flies? Who?—Where?" asked the Water-lily, the insects, and the wild-flowers, in affrighted confusion.

"The Fever. Did ye not see it, yonder by the great tree?"

Yes,—they saw a dense gray shadow; but was it not a cloud which floated from the Spectre-field along the tops of the trees, and disappeared from their sight among the dark branches of the great maple?

The young traveller, under the tree, felt a hot breath blow over him, and aimed a blow with his stick at the shadowy cloud. It dissolved in drops of moisture, covering the boy.

with a sudden shower of rain, which struck a chill through his nerves and marrow. He thought his stroke had stirred the wet foliage of the maple, and caused it to rain down its ice-cold moisture upon him. And the Screech-Owl cried in the thicket, and the Frogs croaked more loudly than ever. Then he heard the Water-lily say:

“But where is the little Will-o'-the-Wisp?” and he saw that the acorn-cup was floating empty at its moorings.

“The little Will-o'-the-Wisp is gone; he is extinguished,” exclaimed the Firefly.

The Daisy asked: “Has he not left even a little heap of ashes behind him in the boat?”

“Do you think a Light-spirit dies like a pastille?” croaked the Owl. “He dies not even when extinguished. He has probably revived again over yonder.”

CHAPTER VIII.

The Spirits of the Festal Lights.—The Vicissitudes of the Fête and the different colours in which they were viewed.—How Hannah lost a riding-lesson and received a lecture on Horticulture : And how the Lecturer saw the flower which he hoped to gather, “ torn up with all its roots and fibres.”

IN the background of the Spectre-field a dazzling, bright lustre had now appeared. A wreath of sparkling lights, scintillating every colour, like the rays from a diamond, hovered along over the morass. As it approached, it melted away in the night-air. Broad beams and lights fell from it like separate leaves and blossoms, moved to and fro on the morass, and dispersed again in countless brightly-coloured sparks and flames. These again ranged themselves together, and, gleaming like

strings of jewels, wound in and out among each other in fantastic mazy figures.

The Water-lily and the Fireflies, the Ivy and Bramble-trails, the Rush-flowers, and all the other spectators expressed their admiration. Even the young Owlet, who was so thoroughly well informed that she seldom admired anything, exclaimed "Superb!" though directly afterwards she coughed, and looked stealthily around to see if any one had noticed how much pleased she had been; at the same time yawning very conspicuously, and holding one wing up before her.

The bright-coloured Flames had arranged themselves in a circle, and were dancing together. They advanced thus up to the edge of the little creek, where they were besieged by questions and entreaties from the Nocturnal Woodland Company, and prepared to relate the incidents of their lives. Meeting and

parting in their dance, they passed through the copsewood on the slope, hovered in the air, and hung like glowing fruits on the boughs of the hazel-bushes, till at last they rested in shining groups on the damp moss.

The Water-lily looked at them admiringly, and could scarcely await the moment when they should speak. The horned Owl rolled his green-spectacled eyes from side to side, and asked if they came from the East, the land of Light and Sunbeams,—from the magical palace of Sheherezade; or from the soul-intoxicating poems of Persian Minstrels.

“No,” said a lustrous green Flame; “we are the children of darkness and the night, and were born far far away from sunlight,—close to this spot. Where the wood ends, and broader shadows are thrown around—under the limes and planes and chestnut-trees. There we had to live and to burn; where

the stately old house looked out above the terraces, from its bright and festive windows, and the servants hurried up and down the wide stone steps; where the Elms whispered in the evening breeze, and River-gods of stone poured the captive waters of the wild brook into smooth marble basins;—there glimmered and blazed a countless crowd of us festival lamps, among the gloomy trees in the park.”

A dazzling bright Flame, gleaming with red light, said quickly—

“ Many thousand roses were glowing there, and snow-white Lily-blossoms were filling their cups with fragrance and evening dew. A bright and joyous throng was moving to and fro in the wide paths; fair ladies, noble men,—youthful charms,—youthful pride,—the seriousness of age,—calm dignity.

“ There were gay groups of dancers on

the soft velvety carpet of closely-shorn turf. Under the trees around burned crackling resinous flames in tall cressets. Then the merry music sounded; clearly shrilling trumpet-blasts, bold tattoo of kettle-drums, fantastic runs of violins; deliberate bass-voles droning their accompaniment, and mingling with the tinkling of little bells and cymbals."

Another Flame with a dull and feeble light of a violet-blue colour interrupted with mournful voice—

"The Roses are all faded long ago! The dark Pines in the park have shot up mightily since that night, and the ground beneath them is carpeted with many brown needles. The statues are weather-worn and overgrown with moss. The wild water flows no longer through narrow pipes, but follows its own way, and has formed two islands in the park. Ah! twenty years is a long long time! The

weeping willows trail their branches in the brook, and the green boughs on Life's tree have withered."

"How dim and feeble you look,—just like pale moonlight!" interposed the little green Flame. "Has the West-wind brought you bad news from the valley? I grudge you not your dance with him over the trembling points of the grasses; but if he always makes you sorrowful, I will disturb your little conversations."

"Is it really twenty years since we were at that festival?" exclaimed the red Flame; "it seems to me but yesterday. Oh! what a festival! Sounds of joy and delight rang through the cool park, bright with evening sunbeams. Fragrance of Stocks and Mignonne, which had slept during the sultry day, now awoke, and greeted those who loitered near with its caresses. Ah! the human

beings! Laughing lips, brilliant eyes into which I looked!"

"And firmly compressed lips, and sadly downcast eyes," murmured the Violet-blue Light softly.

"But what was the festival?" asked Miss Owllet. "Was there a wedding?"

"Alas! alas!" sighed the Blue Flame.

But the Green one replied—

"I heard nothing of a wedding, and saw no bride with wreath and veil; but there was many a wondrously lovely maiden, worthy to have worn such adornments; and many an ardent youth bold enough to aspire to win a maiden's heart."

"Ah, truly—one especially," exclaimed the Red Flame, glowing still brighter with its brilliant ruby light, as it continued: "He was tall and stately as a young Pine-tree when the verdure of spring-time decks its every

bough; his dark hair looked as if bathed in sunlight; his black eyes sparkled with the joy and passion of life, and on his lips there hovered a bewitching smile. His speech was like music; and he danced upon the green lawn as lightly as if borne up by the air."

"Yes," said another Flame, burning with dazzling gold-coloured fire. "He had come across the sea from England to visit his brother. Some relatives had accompanied him; two lovely cousins with their noble mother. Did you not see the graceful island ladies, and mark the fine gold threads of their long silky curls?"

"I saw them," said the Green Light, "I saw them, but only as if they had been shadowy phantoms,—as I saw little clouds near the Evening Star. My Evening Star,—the Star of that evening—was another maiden—the loveli-

est of all. Dark blue child-like eyes looked forth from her sweet face, and on the brown plaits of her hair she wore a wreath of corn-flowers."

"I saw her dancing with the stranger youth!" cried the Red Light,—“he danced with no one else!”

"I saw her sitting beside him on the stone seat!" exclaimed another; and a third said, "I saw her talking merrily with the Youth, as they wandered away from the dancers, through the rose-bushes."

"And I heard every word they uttered then," said the Ruby-red Light,—“the giant lime from which I hung stood near enough for that.” And the Violet-blue Light repeated: "The giant limes from which we hung stood near enough. I too heard everything they were saying to each other, and, alas! another heard it too!"

“Who was that other?” asked the Owl.

“A tall grave young man just under me, who, with his arms folded, was leaning against the trunk of the old Linden. Jasmine-bushes, whose white starry blossoms had already dropped, hid him from them; his dark eyes roamed over the whole scene, but rested only on a single face where dark-blue child-like eyes looked forth from under a wreath of corn-flowers. But, alas! No smile was to be seen on his lips,—even at the sight of so much loveliness.”

“I saw that pale dreamer too,” said the Golden-yellow Light. “A cresset stood close by; and in the flaring flames, little Fire Puck, the Spirit of the Sparks, was jumping up and down. In the full swing of arrogance and holiday-mirth, he seemed to me to be playing pranks on the grave man. He rattled on with such confusing stuff—‘See, thou’rt

severely scorched! Does the pain go deep? Surely *thou* canst extinguish the flames! Ho! bring water here!—quench the fire of Love! Quench it! Ho! Ho!’ Crackling and sputtering, the Imp made high leaps, jumping, now on his shoulder, then into his hair. He did not regard this,—did not feel it. Then ‘Paff,’ he seated himself on his hand; there the hot teeth of the spiteful glow-worm made themselves felt! The grave man started, and looked gloomily down on his hand, at an old deep scar.”

“Did you observe his sorrowful smile?” asked the Violet-blue light.

“Ah! Do tell us what the pair had to say to each other, among the roses,” begged the Water-lily.

The Red Flame answered quickly: “That will I willingly do, as far as I know. Jest and laugh,—joyous childish prattle. Then a spray

of roses caught the maiden's fluttering skirt; the youth freed its folds from the thorns, and, in doing so, found that it was slightly torn. The maiden blamed the rude thorns. He said he could not find fault with the Rose-spray for wishing to make her captive; but he wondered at its letting her go after all. She, however, protested that the thorns might have dealt more gently with her; it was a pity her gown was torn.

“ ‘A little twig has been half-broken off from the Rose-spray, too,’ said he—‘Look here! Do you think, when once you have been seized and held fast, you can be given up and set at liberty, except at the cost of pain and wounds?’ ”

“Did you hear the deep sigh that escaped then from him under the lime-tree?” whispered the Blue Flame.

“The youth bent down,” continued the

other, "and broke off three fresh half-blown roses from the injured spray. He held them towards her, and bid her mark how nearly she resembled them, and pardon the spray for having thought she was one of its own blossoms. They were pale, tenderly-tinted flowers, glowing towards the centre with soft colour—'Maiden's blush' do human beings call the rose. There she stood, a faithful picture of this lovely flower, the sweet Maiden-rose before the Youth. Her dark lashes were lowered in her embarrassment; she held the roses in her white fingers, and had plucked them to pieces before she knew what she was doing."

"Are human beings so cruel to poor flowers?" asked the Water-lily.

"The Youth also said it was cruel," continued the Flame, "to destroy the beautiful roses so pitilessly. 'They shall not die,' he

that—shall not be trodden under foot,' he said, gathering up the tender petals from the ground, and strewing them upon the flames of the cresset close by."

"Did he burn the poor rose-leaves?" cried the horrified Water-lily.

"A heathenish sacrifice offered for the dead," suggested Professor Owl, laughing quite pleasantly.

The Green Light then went on :

"The lovely Maiden stood somewhat behind in the shadow ; but the darting flames threw a changeful, dazzling light over her beauteous white form. Yet more hotly burned the passionate gaze of the two dark eyes fixed upon her. She turned away from so much heat and glare, but did not see that, from the cover of the jasmine-bush, she was watched by two other dark eyes, full of deep and serious inquiry."

“How sorrowfully the Nightingale’s song sounded from the wood!” sighed the Blue Light.

“The Maiden said she was afraid of flames. To ravage and destroy was their grievous work;” so said the bright Golden Will-o’-the-wisp. And then he related how the Youth with eloquent words had highly praised the fiery element: “In all of great or beautiful there was a portion of it—in clear human intellect, in the bold heroic soul, in wine, in precious stones, in great passions. Oh, splendid, splendid was the life of a Flame!—so clear and so brilliant—so dazzling! What matter that it was but brief, and that, when it ceased to burn, nought remained but ashes!”

Then spoke the Violet-blue Light monotonously:

“A dark cloud lowered over the park; we

flickered gently among the trees ; a gust of wind blew through their summits."

"It was just then," exclaimed the Ruby-red Flame, "that the fair maiden cousin with the soft ringlets came. She asked mockingly : ' Shall I take another partner, Clement ? Our dance has already begun ; ' and amid jests and laughter he was carried off, and *she* who wore the wreath of corn-flowers turned slowly in among the bushes—"

"And found herself face to face with the solitary dreamer," interrupted another Flame. "' Ulrich,' she exclaimed, ' here you are at last ! ' The tall grave man asked doubtingly if she was seeking him ; but this she denied with a laugh, and, without thinking what she was saying, asked if he had not been dancing. ' You know, Hannah, that I never dance,' replied he gently ; and she, though reminded of his clerical office, yet thought it so sad that

he should not dance to-day, even if never before."

"Ah, yes; I know what she said then," exclaimed the Red Flame. "She leant on his arm. 'O Ulrich,' said she, 'you do not know how delightful it is to float along here under the delicious green trees—to glide to the sound of the music! And all the lime fragrance! Do you perceive the fragrance, dear Ulrich?—and did you see the evening clouds just now, before it became so dark—the little light evening clouds, floating high up in the air, so flushed with joy, as if it made them happy to see so many happy human beings here below?'"

"Oh, poor, poor, happy child!" sighed the Violet-blue Flame.

And the Green one said:

"She looked full in his face with her sunny smile. He gazed at her in return, took both

her hands in his, and pressed them earnestly without speaking. 'Ah, dear, dear Ulrich Have you ever been at such a charming *fête*? I have never yet seen so green and fragrant a summer! Oh, do speak, Ulrich, and be happy too!'

The Blue Light breathed forth softly :

"How pale he was ! He stifled a deep sigh and asked : ' You are really joyous and happy then, dear Hannah ? ' "

" ' Oh, so very, very happy ! ' exclaimed she, drawing a deep breath, " said the Red Flame ; " and a wonderful light came into her eyes. "


" Tears fell under the lime-tree too ; I heard a low sob, " murmured the Dark-blue Flame.

" Yes, " said the Green one. " She turned suddenly pale. ' Ulrich ! Ulrich ! ' she cried anxiously ; ' you look so serious—you think, do you not, that it is not right to be so happy when one has put on mourning, as I have

done, only a few weeks ago for a dear mother ?'

“ ‘ No, Hannah, no ; God knows I do not think so,’ he said, passing his arm gently round her. She leaned her head on his shoulder and wept passionately. If she could but look once more into her mother’s dear, dear eyes ! sobbed she. She had never felt the loss of her mother so much as she did now in the midst of all this happiness. He comforted her with gentle, brotherly words, and she—”

“ Ah, and she—she let herself be consoled,” said the Ruby Light. “ She dried her tears and smiled again. She had much to talk about, and did not always need an answer. How charmingly did she beg him to grant her the fulfilment of her wish ! She wanted so much to learn to ride, like Ellen and Maria. Clement would give her lessons ; he would begin to-morrow if her spiritual father, her



Ulrich,—the Permitter-in-Chief of all good innocent things (so she called him),—if he thought that she might, and would speak to her father about it.”

“She begged so *charmingly*, say you?” interposed the Bat. “It has often seemed to me that to beg favours is a *hard* task for human beings.”

“I do not know if it was a hard task for the lovely girl, or if something else made her uneasy; but I was hanging low down on a lime-tree, and I heard the beating of her little heart, and saw how often she stopped and drew a long breath. The pale man certainly read the beseeching request in her eyes; saw her standing before him trembling and blushing. How charming she was! But he continued unmoved. He kept silence for a long time, and at last said very earnestly: ‘Do you not know, Hannah, what the mother

Thought about women riding?' Yes; she knew. The dear mother had always thought it very dangerous; but then what safe horses the father's were. Brown Alcydor was as gentle as a lamb.

"Brown Alcydor had been in existence, returned he, two years ago, when he had come back from his travels, and wished very much to take her with him on little riding excursions among the mountains.

"Yes, but that was *then*, Ulrich!' said she. 'And remember Clement. The mother would never have refused him.'

"Are you so very sure of that, Hannah?' he asked, gloomily."

"The thunder was muttering faintly among the hills," said the Violet-blue Flame. "Did you hear it? Did you hear it? And did you see? When the maiden raised her down-cast eyes they were full of tears. 'Ulrich!

Ulrich!' she exclaimed, 'I see that our beautiful plan must come to nothing. Oh, do not look at me so sadly! Surely you do not think that I will disregard the mother's wishes, when you have just reminded me of them?'

"Fresh tears rolled down her cheeks. She took his hand entreatingly, and said softly: 'You will tell your brother, will you not, that we must not ride? Please, dear Ulrich, do *you* tell him; I cannot do so.' He sighed deeply and bent his head in assent. She heard approaching steps, and hastened away to hide her tears."

"Ah, the merry fellow, that dear Clement!" exclaimed the Ruby-coloured Will-o'-the-Wisp, "There he was, back again. Oh how delightful it was to look into his beaming eyes! He asked his brother where Hannah was, and hardly listened for the answer, as he scolded

Ulrich good-humouredly for not having told him what a wonderfully lovely, angelic creature his sister was. 'Hannah is not my sister,' said the other. Well, of course not, he knew that; but the sisterly title was sweet; he could almost envy him the use of that; and also that sisterly style in which she addressed him.

"'If you prolong your stay here, Clement, you will hardly find that I am much to be envied,' was the gloomy answer."

"His brother did not see how pale he was," said the Blue Flame. "He did not see in his face the signs of a struggle."

But the Red one said :

"Yes, yes; and merry Clement confessed that he would not change places with his solemn brother. A lofty bright example was his dear Ulrich to him—but unattainable. High-flown phrases fell from his lips as he praised

his brother ; and still he thought that if he himself, with all the loftiness and weight of virtue, with all the variety of Ulrich's precious learning, must also needs assume his armour of proof for the heart, and his insensibility, —he would prefer to remain the quickly-moved, easily-touched, and easily-wounded fellow that he was by nature. Even if wounds were painful, there was balm for the pain."

"That's enough!" interrupted the Golden Flame. "In a word, he reproached his brother for coldness and insensibility in having lived for years under the same roof with a fairy creature like Hannah, without ever thinking of winning her young heart.

"Thereupon the other asked, 'Who said, my easily-moved, quick-witted brother, that I never thought of it?'—'Ah, well, Ulrich always accomplishes what he undertakes. And, as I see that you have not won Hannah

Or your own, I know that you have never tried to touch her heart.'

" 'What do you see? What do you know?' asked the pale man.

" 'Why Hannah is as frank as a child,' returned his brother with a smile. 'Her whole manner tells plainly in what relation she stands to you. She behaves with you as she might with a dear and highly respected old uncle!'"

Then said the Blue Flame :

"Just then there came a flash of lightning. Was it that which made the man appear so scared, so deadly pale? He walked to and fro in the shadow of the trees. Alas! in his eyes, and in the deep gloom on his brow, were the signs of what his soul was suffering, of how deep and sore the struggle was! . . . A murmuring was heard through the wood."

"Yes; the trees began to rustle," interrupted

the Green Will-o'-the-Wisp; "we were softly cradled, and thought the wind had only come to make sport for us. Ah! *she* was rocked to bliss too now—the lovely Hannah—as she came with light and joyous steps up the broad walk. How Clement flew to meet her! She sent him on a message into the house. She was carrying a basket of flowers in her hand, and under the lindens she joined the pale Ulrich."

"He stopped short," said the Green Flame, "and looked kindly at her; but no warm sign of life was to be seen on the marble paleness of his forehead. He was, she said, to help her to tie up bouquets for the last dance of the *fête*, quickly. Had they been made earlier they would all have been faded; so they must make haste! As if in a dream he took the flowers from the Maiden's hand, and said . . . he said . . . he spoke of the flowers . . . Oh,



She was carrying a basket of flowers.

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for a long while! I know not what he said. I did not understand it, and have not remembered it."

"I did not listen at all," cried the Red Light.

But the Dark-blue Flame said:

"He spoke so slowly, so impressively, I heard every word, and can remember all. This is what he said: 'Flowers? Flowers, Hannah? If you will cultivate flowers for yourself, let not the flower of earthly bliss be among them. Pluck it if you find it in your path; and God grant that it may bloom plentifully and full of fragrance for you. But do not strive to cultivate it with your own hands in your garden. Do not count and reckon and speculate on each leaf, each new shoot of the young plant. And rejoice not as if the blossom were a certainty, when you see but the bud. Yea; even if you think that surely it will open, and the glorious

flower appear before you on the morrow,— a frost may come in the night, or a strange hand tear it up with all its roots and fibres,—and that gives pain. That flower, Hannah, the Lord God alone can cultivate in hidden places, how and for whom He will. So we, with all our horticulture, must refrain from that.’ This was what he said. The Maiden looked at him with wide-open eyes. She understood him not, and said : ‘What can be the matter with you to-day? You are so solemn ; not a bit like my dear old Ulrich !’”

“Hurrah for the Storm-Wind !” cried the Yellow Light. “It rushed furiously through the dark tree-tops, and shook them mightily. There was no more rocking for us. He blew the life out of many of us ; and those whom the Storm spared, were drowned and beaten to death by the heavy rain-drops. Of what use was it for the pine-flames to combat, with

crackling, sparkling desperation, for their lives? . . . How dumb the music became! How silently it slipped away! The Storm had sent all the dancers indoors. Ho!—how they hurried hither and thither in confusion! How the servants ran!

“Now the wild Rain-fairies danced on the deserted lawn, dashed rustling through the foliage of the trees, and gathered together in the broad gravel paths.”

The Green Flame asked if the light red evening clouds had begun to wish for a dance, when they saw the merry festival below,—and if they had invited all the dark clouds to assemble. Or, perhaps, they themselves, clad in their watery rays, may have been among the dancers; but who could recognize them again, that had seen them in the evening sky?”

“It was not the desire to dance that had

inflamed the Storm," said the Dark-violet Light. "That was a seriously-designed work. Only He who sends the weather can know why the festive sounds should be silenced, and the joyous Lights should not burn to an end.

"Now other pale Lights were seen, and other voices grew fearfully loud. The rocks and the earth quaked; everything bowed and bent and trembled—except the fearlessness of human mirth. Behind the glazed windows another blaze of light had been kindled. Soon the roll of kettledrums and braying of trumpets could be heard again through the stormy night by us who were down below. I saw and heard all this. The broad trunk of the lime tree sheltered me from the wind, and the leaves made a green roof for me against the rain.

"Beyond the rose-bushes and the lawn on

which the dance had been held, through the waving, silvery veils of the wet dancers, I saw a bit of the Manor-house; the dark corner-tower, and the old terraces with their stone balustrades. A subdued sound of music came through the brilliant windows. I heard a Hunting-horn complaining,—he did not like the ball-room,—he was longing for fresh night air, and the rustling of the trees. At last the storm was over; the rain fell steadily, and there could be heard the heavy, monotonous tread of a man's feet pacing up and down the wet gravel path. I knew that pale brow and bowed head. He cared not for the rain which was falling on him through the roof of foliage above. Twice he pushed back the wet hair from his face. Then he stood still with folded arms. I saw him turn his dark eyes towards the midnight sky. The heavens were veiled by black

clouds, and no star was visible. And yet, when I looked longer into his eyes, it seemed to me that he must nevertheless have seen a star. The traces of strife had disappeared from his features, a deep sigh heaved his breast, and he went slowly towards the house, where he passed from my sight through a little side-door. . . . I was the only Flame now left alive in the Midnight Park. The leaves of the linden tree began to move; I saw a heavy drop hanging above my head, and I—I saw nothing more.”

“That was indeed a long story,” sighed the young Owl, yawning audibly, and fanning herself with her wing. “I feel quite hot after it.”

“Oh, it was beautiful!” said the Water-lily. “I did not quite understand it all, but still it was very beautiful.”

“In order to understand such stories

thoroughly, my child, you must possess experience of life," explained Miss Owlet.

Professor Owl had been sitting silent for a long while, thoughtfully pressing his claw against his curved beak; and now he shook his great head, and observed that the flower Earthly Bliss was quite unknown to him. He had never met with it in his foreign travels, nor in books, nor Herbaria; nor had Linnæus known anything of *Fortuna Terrestris*.

"Oh! why speak in Latin?" exclaimed the Firefly. "We know that flower quite well, [and my comrades, by its names in the language of our own country; only we each call it something different:—Inheritance,—or a rich wife—the highest prize in a lottery—*Avancement*—*Carrière*—and so forth.

"*Avancement* and *Carrière* forsooth, for a flower's names in the language of our own

country!" remarked Miss Owlet contemptuously.

But the other Firefly, whose ideas took higher flight, said that Earthly Bliss was not a *flower* at all, but a fresh green tree of which the correct names were Laurel and Myrtle.

CHAPTER IX.

The Spirit of the Altar-Taper.—The Ancient Church of Nordingen.—Hannah's happiness adds the sacrifice of a Wounded Heart to that of a scarred Hand.—The Young Pastor's Exhortation.

SILENCE now fell upon the whole company, as their attention was drawn in another direction. Where the brightly-coloured, sparkling Flames had been talking and glowing, all was dark and silent ; only down close to the water there burned upon a wet stone a tall clear Flame. How he got there nobody knew ; and no one could believe that he had ever skipped about over the morass like the other Will-o'-the-Wisps.

He stood quite erect, with a serious air ;

burning steadily, and shedding a clear light around. As they all looked expectantly at him, and each felt shy of addressing him, he himself broke the silence, and said in a sonorous and deliberate voice :

“ I was a Light of the Church.”

“ A Light of the Church ? ” exclaimed Professor Owl with a snarl. “ It remains to be proved what sort of people recognize you as a Light of the Church after your dissolution. In what century did you live, my very reverend Ignis Fatuus ? ”

“ In the nineteenth century, Herr Professor, —but you misunderstand me ; I was, in the days of my life, an Altar-Taper.”

“ Oh !—well, I beg pardon ; I did not expect that,” snuffed the Owl. “ It would have been a very *piquant* story, though, if departed Luminaries of the Church skipped about on morasses as Will-o'-the-Wisps.”

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The gray Child of the Vale, the memorial of a pious bygone age.

The Flame looked gravely at him, and kept silence. After a pause he spoke thus:—"On a rising ground in the midst of a wide and fertile valley, there is a little old church, round which stand in a half-circle the forest-clad mountains, with their solemn rocky summits, which have looked down, for many a century, on it, the gray child of the vale, the memorial of a pious bygone age. The blue vault of heaven and the soft summer air are spread above it; the July sun darts its hot rays among the lime-trees at the church-door; but the interior of the sacred building is cool, and dim, and mysterious. Neither mountains nor trees can see into the Sanctuary; only the clear eye of the sun can penetrate through the high, stained windows. The small panes glow dark and fiery, and shed wondrous colour-harmonies over the old gray stones. On each side, from the altar to the entrance,

stand slender pillars, whose airy shafts spring up to bear aloft the vaulted roof. They do not bear it like a heavy covering that oppresses them, but rear it upwards with strong arms, as easily as an offering of love which they would willingly bear higher and nearer to the heart of Him towards whom all desire tends. O House of God, sublime in thy aspiring height!—surely thy silent walls breath peace,—and holy reverence watches over thy threshold.

“The Altar was decked with fresh roses ; and on a carpet of the same stood the cross from whose height the Saviour’s mild countenance looked down. Close to it shone, as a special festal ornament, two tall snow-white fragrant lilies ; and the well-worn flagstones in the nave had also been strewn with flowers. The fresh garden flowers, plucked in the quiet early morning, and two lighted tapers on the

Altar, were the only signs of life within the silent old walls. Where were the hands which had raised these pillars? How many tapers had already burned and been extinguished here? How many blessings had been here pronounced? The lips which spoke them,—the heads which had been reverently bent to receive the benediction of the Church,—the hearts which had prayed here,—how many of them were still in life?

“The empty seats were silent and deserted; and outside, framed by the pointed archway of the church door, I could see beneath green trees many an old, weather-beaten grave-cross, amid waving grass, and many a freshly-raised, flower-clad hillock. How many are buried yonder who once sat in these seats? And what of those who are to worship here to-day? There is still many a vacant space out yonder in God's acre.

“Thus was dreaming a silent Altar-Taper which burned there, when a solemn peal of bells rang forth from the tower above, and the homely dwellers in the valley began to draw towards the church, through the field-paths, in their holiday clothes.” Thus spoke the Flame.

The Water-lily said, “Ah! It was a good thing that people came, and you did not remain alone in the silent church!”

Then the Flame continued, “I saw many a charming face waiting at the church door—many a sunburnt, bearded cheek, many an honest peasant woman with little children, and young inquisitive maidens, all looking towards the old park walls which adjoined the churchyard. The wicket gate was standing wide open, and along the shady paths of the park there approached a slow, solemn procession of human beings. The sound of

the bells ceased ; the organ raised its clear voice, and the full notes of a pious, ancient hymn were poured forth through the House of God. They filled the silent space with sound, rising and re-echoing from the vault above.

“ A little door opened noiselessly ; I heard footsteps in the aisle, and saw the young pastor approaching the Altar. What had the flowers done to harm him ? He turned pale as he perceived them, and his lips trembled with a silent grief. He subdued it with a deep sigh, ascended the steps, pressed his folded hands against his breast, and prayed in silence. I heard many foot-falls in the church, a rustle of garments, whispering and talking. I saw a bright shimmer, but only through a mist, as though in a dream ; my gaze was fixed upon the silent form at prayer, and upon him alone. I saw how his breast

heaved and swelled, till the light of victory rested on his brow, and in his upraised eyes there shone a soft gleam of holy peace.

“It seemed to me as if the silent breath of his prayer had animated the pillars which stood around, as if the gray stone shafts grew taller, and the vault above became wider and clearer,—as if it were transparent, and as if, borne aloft by organ-tones and prayer, it rose higher and opened. A ray of light broke in,—then the organ became silent, and I heard the voice of the pastor resounding clear and full through the church. He had turned, and was standing erect, and looking down full of seriousness and kindness on a youthful pair at the Altar step.”

“A bridal pair?” exclaimed the young Owlet. “Was there really going to be a wedding?”

“Oonk! oo-oonk! oonk!” sounded from

the pool below ; and the boy under the Maple felt a cold shudder run through him.

“The young pastor was to confirm a betrothal,” said the Flame. “Two young hearts were beating high and solemnly ; and God’s blessing, through the pastor’s lips, was now to plant their golden bliss in eternity—to give to their sweet dream durability for a long life and beyond the grave. Such a holy hope I could read in the blue, child-like eyes of the lovely bride as she raised them tremblingly, full of inward trust, to the young pastor. She shrank slightly before the loftiness and the solemn earnestness which she saw in his countenance. The holy importance of the moment in which she was standing there before the eye of God, she understood then, as she had never done before ; and, pale and trembling, she leaned for support on the arm of her betrothed.

“The tall youth looked agitated, but happy—so happy! Confidently he took her hand, as if it were only needful to hold the tender hand within his own, to give strength and security to her also.”

“The strong hand that knew so well how to protect you,—hold it fast!” whispered a Forget-me-not on the bank to itself, and then asked entreatingly, “Oh! tell me did you see a scar upon his hand?”

“I saw a scar,” said the Flame, “but not on *his* hand. On the pastor’s hand, there I saw the scar.”

“Oh, poor, poor hand!” said the Water-lily; and the Ivy-trail said, “Where scars are, there grief has gnawed and then been overcome. The pastor’s voice sounded full and clear, did you not say so?”

“Yes,” said the Flame. “Clearly and powerfully the words sounded from his lips.”

on which he preached the sermon. Words of the prophet he called them—‘They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.’”

“Did he speak those words,” asked Miss Owlet, “to the young pair that stood there before him in youthful strength and fulness of joy? Those words the pale man ought to have preached to himself.”

“*He* stood upon a rock,” said the Flame; “a radiant glow of victory was on his brow. But happiness and rosy cheeks, these need a firm support to keep them from failing and becoming pale. Therefore he warned them, with earnest fervour, to seek that support which was able to uphold them for ever. Then he made them exchange rings, and pronounced the Blessing over them.”

“When he made them exchange rings,” said the Ivy-trail, “and when the bride saw the scar on the pastor’s hand, what happened then?”

“When they exchanged rings the bride saw nothing but the rings,—or if she saw any hand then, it was that beloved hand which was now to wear her ring ;—that hand was smooth and delicate, and bore no scar.

“The organ sounded again, and a joyful hymn of thanksgiving poured forth in swelling waves through the ancient walls. Then it was over. The voices were silent. The melody played on the organ became soft and subdued. The bride lay weeping gently in her father’s arms. I saw greetings, heard congratulations ; people pressed and hurried to leave the church ; the Sacristan approached the Altar,—the ceremony was over.”

“Always the scar,—the scar on the hand !”

murmured the listener under the maple-tree.

“ I know a hand with such a scar ! ”

“ Was *that* a wedding ? ” exclaimed a sprig of Thyme ; “ I thought a wedding was much more cheerful than that. ”

CHAPTER X.

The Spirits of the Ball-room Sconce-light and of the Card-table Candle.—How the Bride lost a Rose and found a Thorn.

A BRIGHT gleam, like lightning, flashed across the morass. Two Flames, tall and slim and dazzlingly bright, were to be seen not far from the bank: one of them rose and fell, flickering restlessly; the other kept dancing around it in graceful, mazy figures, exclaiming gaily, "Come hither, come hither, whoever wishes to hear about us. Attention! It won't last long." Then gliding down close to the water, he leaned lightly against the root of a tree, and said, "I was once at a Ball, about which I will tell you."

A Firefly said, "One can see that you have been to a ball, you dance so well."

"Oh, sweet Liberty!" said the Will-o'-the-Wisp, breathing into brighter flame. "Sweet Liberty on the wide damp moor. To be freed from wick and candlestick. To be able to dance and skip over the green field; to dive and swim in the water of the marsh. Dost think I could have danced at the ball? Sitting still and upright all the while, held by the tenacious wick; climbing down the wick, yet never reaching the floor; flickering with desire, eating my heart out with longing. That is the life of a Taper."

"Where was the ball? who gave it?" asked the other Firefly.

"Yes, who gave it?" said the Flame, referring to his companion, who was glowing brightly just behind him; "who was the giver? It must have been the Water-Nymph

who gave everything in those beautiful mountains. The people who danced there were all her visitors, and had come from afar to drink the wonder-working water of her springs. It is true I did not see the Water-Nymph at the ball—the room was so large, the brilliant crowd so many-coloured and so dense. I do not know really whether or not she did give the ball.

“ We were both at the entertainment, I and my companion here. My place was in the ball-room, on a wide window-pier. There were three of us seated on a bronze sconce—three young beaming Flames flickering with the delight of seeing, and the desire of dancing, and yet banished to the wall. Just ask young daughters of mankind if it is pleasant to sit still by the wall, when sweet persuasive strains are inviting to the dance.

“Through the open window near me the

scent of orange-flowers and cool night-air streamed in to the hot room. The orange-blossom's fragrance is as intoxicating as music. Young Flames delight to hear that it loves them; and, as it whispered and flattered them caressingly, both my companion tapers soon forgot the dance and the human beings. But *I* did not. I looked away to the broad entrance door—I saw the guests enter in long procession——”

“Tell us the names of the guests; describe them all to us—all of them,” cried the Grasses and Weeds in chorus.

“About one pair will I tell you—the crowning ornament of the ball,” said the Will-o'-the-Wisp. “The room was a brilliant sea of light—full of the rustle of silken skirts, the soft sound of many human voices. Sweet sounds and cool streams of flower-fragrance mingled confusedly together; and below the bright

throng of guests was surging hither and thither. I watched, from my lofty seat, all the splendour of the scene; and a thousand other tapers in groups on the wall, and on chandeliers which swung from the roof, were also looking on. It was so bright down there.

“But the broad folding doors were thrown open, and *they* entered.

“On the arm of a tall dark man hung an elegant, delicately-formed woman of singular grace. All eyes turned towards them, and all the tapers burned more brightly, and beamed down upon them. Was that what made her look so bright? The light gleamed upon the white folds of her silken gown, and played in golden sparks on her brown plaits. Pure and bright she was as a dew-drop, as a diamond bathed in light and beaming with it. Her child-like blue eyes shone softly as

she was led in, simple and unconfused, not noticing how admiringly all eyes rested upon her."

"Did she wear Corn-flowers on her brown plaits?" asked a little blade of grass.

"No. She wore white roses on her breast. Her beautiful head had no adornment save her massive plaits. That dark ornament was almost too heavy for so delicate a creature. She held her head slightly bent as though under some burden that oppressed it."

"A young head that has no heavier burden to bear than its own plaits is not bowed down to the ground by that," said the Ivy-trail.

"But did I say she bore no other burden?" said the Will-o'-the-Wisp. "Alas! when she drew near I saw a shade upon her brow, and little lines around her lovely mouth, which told of sorrow! The tall slender man at her side was like a dark setting for the brilliant

jewel. I could see that he thought a great deal of her, his sweet wife ; he was proud of her ; a slight smile of triumph played upon his lips, as he conducted her through the crowd. Ah, how stately and aristocratic he looked ! His black eyes flashed imperiously, and how finely formed were his noble features !”

The other Flame interrupted, exclaiming fiercely,—

“ Trust him not ! trust him not ! Such a smile brings death ; the fiery gleam of such black eyes brings pain !”

But the first one reproved him.

“ Back ! back ! I will not have you making blots on my fair picture. I am a Light, and will speak of the light ; if you will afterwards paint shadows you are welcome to do so. I saw, however, how kind and careful he was, how he led the lovely lady to a seat just below me, and warned her of the draught, that foe of

Lights and men. I saw greetings exchanged ; they were soon surrounded by other guests. An old gentleman came forward, a friend of her father in his youth. How sweet and affectionate she was to him, the graceful young wife ! Partners were introduced too ; her husband urged her to dance, and she complied graciously. The inspiriting music struck up, and she was carried off. Then I saw her turn round quickly once more. She came up to her husband's side. She was quite pale, and her eyes rested anxiously upon him. She laid her hand on his arm, and said in a voice of entreaty, as earnest as if her life depended on the answer,—‘Clement, will not you also dance ?’ ‘Certainly, my love, by-and-bye ; but I must first speak to some friends, who I am told are here.’ So he replied with a smile.”

“He smiled ? It was only with the lips,

then!" exclaimed the other Flame. "He promised; but did she believe his word? What happened? What did she do?"

"She sighed deeply and sadly," said the first, "and pressed her hand to her heart. Yes; and as she passed through the room, she no longer seemed to me to sparkle like a diamond, but in her pale weary lustre she more nearly resembled a precious pearl. Then she floated by in the dance, calmly, silently, lightly, as if wafted on air—her white silken drapery falling glistening around her. In sooth, I forgot my wish to dance in the pleasure of watching her. She rested, and her eyes wandered searchingly round the room. All at once a flash of joy shone from their blue depths; she discovered her husband leaning against a pillar, and saw him nod cheerfully to her. After every dance her eyes sought him again. Soon after every dance they

sought in vain. The place near the pillar was vacant; and through the whole length of the room no beloved pair of eyes met hers.

“Again and again she floated past in the dance. How sad and pale she began to look! In the swift waltz, one of the roses on her bosom fell to pieces. Its white petals fluttered round her, and followed her, borne up by the draught. Is she not herself the white blossom from which those fading leaves have fallen? How wearily her head droops! I saw what no one else could see—two bright drops which fell on her roses. Strange hot dew was that! Then I heard her speak some faltering words to her partner. It is so oppressive in the dancing-room, she cannot bear it. She takes the arm of her father’s old friend, and begs him to lead her out. She would like to take a turn through the other rooms.”

“Oh, bring her far away if she is so

sorrowful!" said the Water-lily. "Bring her to us in the peaceful forest. We love her so much!"

The Ivy-trail said,—

"Many years have passed away since that evening; and years make the heart calm—yea, still as death."

"Still as death," gently repeated a tired echo, which had awoke in the valley, and "Oonk! Oo-oonk! Oonk!" sounded again from below the water.

"Ho-ho! Lights here! More life!" exclaimed the second flaring Will-o'-the-Wisp, whirling madly on. "Summon the Storm-wind! stir up the water! fight and tear the trees! List to me! list to me! Hear what the Light-spirit says! I despise silent gazers, silent waters, silent trees. Motion—excitement is life! change is Life! The breath of Life is passion. Ha! flaring, sparkling Passion!"

“Hi! how mad thou art!” said the Thyme-blossoms. “One would think that thou too must have come from the ball.”

“From the ball—yes; but not from the dancing-room! Not dancing only can make the heart beat, the cheek glow. Sweeter than music sounds the clink of gold. A small chamber, quiet and retired, in which the dance-music is but faintly heard. Here meet together the initiated, who do not shun the hot intoxicating draught, do not shun the fever of passion, the wild destructive contest in which they smilingly engage, the struggle round the whirling ball of chance! Here are the lists! Woe to the conquered! and woe, woe to the victor!

“I was burning on the table, on which bright-coloured cards and gold pieces lay strewn. Men were seated there—combatants; their hot breath blew over me. One and

another clutched me hastily and moved me hither and thither. Oh, how excited they were! A Flame-spirit could understand the deep glow in their eyes,—the desire that trembled round their lips. Ah! woe to Flames that they are able to understand such things! When gold and cards meet together, there lurks deception in the nearest corner; icy-cold selfishness arises inflexible, and with her hard hand wipes from the countenance all tender human sympathy. Demons lurk, too, in the bright golden pieces and the cards, which have cruel power over weak human hearts; they blink maliciously at the players, and cheat and confuse their senses.

“ Oh, how the passion burns! how it glows in the dark eyes of the tall slender man! how it throbs in his weak human heart! From a well-filled purse he shakes out gold upon the table. His hand plays uneasily with

the coins. A golden ring glitters on that hand—a wedding-ring.”

“A wedding-ring? Alas!” sighed the Ivy-trail; “is not so sacred a token a defence against the demons of gambling, powerful enough to enforce flight from their neighbourhood?”

“Oh, he plaid and played,” continued the Will-o'-the-Wisp; “the gold pieces before him became fewer, the fire in his black eyes burned more gloomily and fiercely. The higher the stake the greater the longing!”

“Then I saw enter, by the open door behind him, a white airy form, leaning on the arm of a man. She drew back, left her companion, and approached. She moved along over the carpet with a fairy tread. Ha! how I flared and made signals! ‘Back! back! thou white, angelic form! what wilt thou here? Oh! remain afar!’ But she did

not notice the signals of a Taper Flame, that deathly pale and beauteous woman. She remained standing behind the player, staring into the pier-glass opposite, and seeing in it herself and him. There were other persons standing at the table, one of whom pushed forward a chair for her ; she thanked him with a gentle inclination of her head, and remained standing.

“ He played on and on. He shuffled the cards with dexterous fingers, and dealt them out with a light hand ; and he threw about gold pieces as lightly and carelessly as he did the cards. Oh, wild, bright, glittering play ! Does she indeed take pleasure in it ? She only gazes into the mirror at his pale face, the lips so tightly compressed, the noble features marred and distorted by passion.”

The Ivy-trail whispered, “ God created

man in His own image ; in the image of God created He him."

The Will-o'-the-Wisp continued : " I read in her wide-open blue eyes—oh ! Flame-spirits like to read in the light of eyes!—in those blue orbs I read consuming sorrow.

" She opens her lips to utter his name, but no sound issues from them. And he?—He feels not the soft breath which plays through his hair, feels not the delicate hand which rests lightly on his shoulder. Does not the ring on his finger speak to him ? The delicate hand wears a ring the counterpart of his own.

" Away rolls the luck ; with it rolls the gold. Now it turns again—the luck turns ; back comes the gold. The gold pieces before him increase in number more and more. How greedily he stretches out his hand to seize them—in every shining golden piece a poisoning demon ! Who wins gold thus, takes

sin home! His laugh sounds hollow. Ah! no pure tones can come from that breast!

“And her poor, poor blue eyes! What did I read in them? What did she see in the mirror? First the wild mad joy in his face, on his lips, which it was grievous to look upon—a demoniacal joy which more nearly resembled mockery. Ah! rather would she trace anger and rage in his features than such sinful gladness! And then his hand. Is that the beloved hand which has so often held her own in its gentle grasp—the hand that wears her ring?

“Thy heart beats fast, thou poor pale wife. Keep thyself calm, have patience! consume thyself in grief, as I consume myself in flame! Life is short. . . . Is not the air here oppressive, more stifling than in the dancing-room? She gasps for breath, and turns away from the reflection in the mirror.

“Then her eyes fall on another player—a youth, he is still almost a boy, and so exhausted, so pale, with hollow cheeks. A fever-glow is in his sunken eyes, and at home, perhaps, a mother’s heart is praying for him and grieving over him! Oh, how thin that hand looks which has just put down its last gold piece! Wearily he folds his arms and leans back in his chair. And he, her husband, has taken that last gold piece!

“I saw her shudder and begin to tremble. A cry of anguish escaped her, and, as she fell fainting to the ground, she was raised by strangers. That cry reached the ear of the gambler; he sprang up; the table reeled; the candlestick was overturned; and I—was extinguished!”

“Oh, how terrible!” sighed the Water-lily. And the young Owlet said, “I know some one, a raven he is, who ought to have heard that.”

The Frogs were croaking loudly in the pool; the trees and the rushes were moving and shivering; and on the bank a pair of wide-open human eyes were gazing forth from beneath the Maple-tree into the night. Great drops of agony were standing on a pale young brow, and heavy sighs escaping from an anxious bosom.

But the forest trees became still again, and the Grass and Rushes ceased to shiver, and listened to the wild throbs of that troubled human heart.

CHAPTER XI.

The Spirits of the Watcher's Lamp, of the Sealing-taper, and of the Light in the Chamber of Death.—How a Wife spent a night of weary watching.—How a Mother bequeathed her Treasure.—And how she was freed from her troubles.

A NEW Will-o'-the-Wisp was already in the midst of his story, before the boy had so far composed himself as to be able to hearken once more.

The Light who now spoke was telling about a sick child by whose bed he had kept watch. This is what he was saying,—

“Ah! I was so tired, so tired. It was so late at night, and still, still I had to watch, still I had to consume my oil, one drop after the other, and I so tired, so weary. To have watched all the evening, and still to have

to keep my eye open. Not to be able to go to sleep, nor even to doze.

“The physician had come very late; he had sat by the bedside and looked at the child, and had felt his pulse. He had told the young mother that the disease was overcome, the danger was past, and her child was safe. She had accompanied him to the door, and he had said that she must now think of herself, and recruit her own worn-out strength.

“Then he went away, and all was silent. The lonely young wife was kneeling at the child's bed. She raised clasped hands and tearful eyes—ah! those eyes—in silent, fervent thanksgiving. With a grateful smile she looked upon her child, took his wasted little hand, and wiped the dew of sleep from the sweet pale face.

“It was so late, and the night was so still;

everything was asleep, and the sick child slept also ; only I and the young mother were awake.

“How wan she looked and ill! Her beautiful eyes were so sorrowful, saddened by night-watches and tears. The neglected wealth of her luxuriant hair was carelessly pushed back from her brow ; her thin cheeks and transparent, delicate features betrayed the grief that dwelt in her heart. ‘My child, my poor, poor child,’ she whispered. Then leaning her head against the bed, she wept hot tears which would not be kept back ; her form was shaken by sobs ; smothered sounds of grief escaped her.”

“She must have been glad—must have rejoiced!” said the Water-lily ; “but does joy look like that?”

The little Flame continued—“I was so tired! It was so dark ; and darkness was in her soul also. Perhaps it gave her pain

to be so lonely in her great joy. She had sent her faithful maid away. No one was to watch with her—only I, and I was so tired! I watched, and watched.

“The clock was ticking on the chimney-piece; the rain was dropping monotonously from the gutters; the young mother, whose tears were now subdued, sat on a cushion on the floor, gazing straight before her, with hands clasped on her knee. Carriages were rumbling through the street. She raised her head, and as they rattled past it drooped again. The night grew more silent. As it became later no more carriages rolled by. No sound save the watchman’s horn, and now and then the footstep of some belated passenger. How the pale lady listened!

“The footsteps sound and re-echo so far upon the wet pavement,—far, far through the night. How she listens!—and, alas! as they

pass she sighs deeply, and the shadows below her eyes grow darker. She watches ; and I, so tired, oh ! so weary, watch with her ! ”

“ Of what use are weary watchers ? ” said a Firefly. “ If you were so tired and sleepy, why did you not shut your little lamp-eye, and take a nap ? ”

“ Should I have left her *alone* ? Alone in the dark night, with her watchful tearful eyes, with the waking sorrow in her heart that would not sleep ? Ah ! know you not that light shines in the heart ? A spark of light, even a dim little lamp, is a friend in dark soul-sadness. I know you not, you brilliant creature. If you are a little Lamp, and know of an anxious heart that watches lonely through the night, and of wet eyes that cannot sleep, be you their friend ; desert them not ; go not out ; watch with them and comfort them with your mild light, till the first Ray

of Morning enters at the window ; who understands more about it than you or I ? ”

The insect looked at him in silence, as if meditating on these words, while in a whisper, rendered tremulous by his flicker, the Flame continued : “ Silent, silent night, and soft silent rain in the street. What agitates the pale mother ? Her boy is sleeping, yet she starts up with a quick flush upon her cheek. Hark ! there is a man’s tread in the street ; she knows it well. Alas ! the bell,—so shrill and loud ! The mother looks anxiously towards the little sleeper. He has turned his head, but is still sleeping. I see her listening at the door ; she pushes aside the heavy folds of the curtain, lays her hand on the door-handle, and turns it, but does not open the door ; only enough to listen,—to hear. Her delicate pale face against the dark curtain, now pale no longer. Oh, what a light shines

in her beautiful moist eyes! The house-door creaks; she bends forward to listen. It is He! —he is speaking!

“Is he *angry*? Yes—yes! ‘The carriage ought to have been sent.’ Truly yes! That she should not have thought of it! Ah! where is her memory now?

“She hears his steps in the corridor as he approaches, following a servant carrying a candle, whose light falls through the opening of the door. Now he has reached it. Now—no?—no. They pass it by; she hears no question—not a single question. Alas! Then she presses both her tender hands against her forehead and listens again. ‘He will certainly come back; he is only going to change his wet clothes—it is raining still.’

“Then the door shuts, and she hears steps once more. Only the servant who is going to bed! Still, with her ear close to the door, she

listens ; but silent is the night,—so silent the house, no steps are heard in it,—no steps in the street. In the silent room there is only the soft deep breathing of the sick child, and the sorrowful sighing of the lonely mother—the lonely wife. She has closed the door ; she takes a step or two and stands still. How fixed is her gaze !—how pale her cheek ! She wrings her hands. ‘He knows not,—knows not how things are here. He does not once inquire,—does not even look in.’ She draws a deep breath, trembles violently, and presses her hands to her heart.

“I see her totter forward to her child’s bed, and there she sinks down with a cry of anguish. Ah ! pitiful, sweet, and welcome was the swoon which took her in its embrace and stilled her grief.

“Women came in from the next room,



There she sinks down with a cry of anguish.

and laid her fainting form upon the couch. Dark drops of blood were oozing from her mouth. The terrified maid-servants saw fresh drops also upon her dress, and on the child's bed-clothes, where her head had rested. Oh, poor, poor wife!—poor sick child, and poor Lamp, that was obliged to burn and keep watch, and to see all this!”

“Was she dead?” asked the Water-lily.
“Oh! she was not dead?”

“What did you gain by your wearisome night-watch?” exclaimed a Firefly. “Not even a word of thanks?”

“Oh, I did not serve for thanks,” said the Flame. “We little Lights work not for reward and gratitude. That may great ones do, who wish to be admired, such as know that they are Great Lights.”

The Water-lily asked once more: “Oh, tell

us that she was not dead?" But the Will-o'-the-Wisp had glided away and disappeared, and could give no answer.

* * * * *

MANY WILL-O'-THE-WISPS had danced and been extinguished on the Spectre-field. Many had approached and related their stories, and had sunk beneath the ground, or leapt into the pool, or had glided away under the trees and disappeared in the forest. Now only a few Flames glimmered on the morass, and after these the Fireflies flew, conducting them to the bank; where, after much persuasion and hesitation, they consented to relate their experiences of the time when they lived on the wick among mankind.

One of them began thus:—"I have wandered hither from afar, through clefts and ravines, along rivers and deep lakes, over green meadows and desolate marshes, and under

overhanging rocks. In the dark night-season I am allured, and beckoned, and drawn onward by a magic force; I am driven through the land by longing—by longing to behold again two deep blue eyes, into which I once looked, when I lived my taper life upon the wick. I can find no rest until I once more behold those dark blue eyes.”

“Were they human eyes, or the eyes of flowers?” asked the Water-lily.

“Oh, human eyes!—clear, expressive, child-like eyes, in the pale face of a youthful lady sick unto death. She was lying at a glass door opening on a garden, surrounded by cushions and soft wraps. I was burning on the little table before her, on a low candle-stick. Oh! wondrous happiness for a Taper! To burn in full daylight, fanned by soft spring air—to look forth into God’s beauteous world.

“The brilliant colouring of the south, the splendour of the sunset, lay spread around on land and sea; the pointed rocky summits of the range of hills glowed in purple light; the mild southern sun gave a lively warmth to the rugged rocks. It could do nothing for the sick lady, who had come hither in search of health, beyond breathing some of its evening red upon her wan and sunken cheeks, and soft soothing balm into her wounded spirit. The night of death was fast approaching; its shadows lurked round eyes and mouth, and dimmed the colour there. In her heart warm life was throbbing still; and warm love beamed from her eyes.

“I saw the old maid-servant who had carried me in go softly about the room, opening the curtained windows to the evening light. The sunbeams, falling with subdued brilliancy through the cypresses, and through the vines

twining in front of the windows, played on the coloured straw matting on the floor. They tell most brightly upon the golden hair of a child, who was rolling little marbles about the floor, and shouting as he crawled after them.

“When the old woman placed me on the table, the invalid was writing. Now she paused; her wasted hand rested languidly on the paper, her weary head on the back of her couch. Her large dark blue eyes were watching the child with silent delight, and when the old woman came to take him away she protested against it. ‘Leave him a little longer with me, Bridget,’ she besought in her gentle voice; ‘he is so sweet and good. Oh, he is always good when he is with me. The half-hour cannot yet be over, for which the Doctor gave leave!’

“The old woman said she thought she ought

to take him out into the garden ; it had been too hot all day. 'But Walter will say good-bye to dear Mother first,' said she, going to the couch with the child.

"Ha! what was that?" cried the Flame. "More lights here? I must see what that was."

"What's the matter? what have you seen?" asked the Rush-flowers.

"Oh, Her deep dark blue eyes!—on the other side of the creek. They looked at me from beneath yonder maple. I cannot see anything now."

"*We* cannot see anything either," exclaimed the young Owlet. "Go on; you are dreaming."

"There were tears in them," said the Will-o'-the-Wisp. "They were looking across at me, wide open, so full of pain and sorrow."

"You are dreaming—only dreaming," replied

the Rush-flowers. "Come, tell us, instead of your dreams, what became of the child and the invalid."

"The child put out his hand," continued the Will-o'-the-Wisp, "and offered his fresh little mouth for a kiss. The invalid bent down, took the child's head between her two hands, pressed her pale face against his curly golden hair, and then pushed him hastily from her, and signed to the old woman to take him away.

"She watched them both with glistening eyes, till they were hidden among the shrubs in the garden; then she quickly caught up her pen again, and continued to write. I looked on,—I looked at the paper, and read every word. I will tell you what she wrote. This was it:—

"Do not grieve for me on account of this sorrow. To mourn a dead father, dear Ulrich, is a wholesome

grief; and when God took from me my little first-born, that too was a wholesome grief, even though I thought my heart must break under its intense woe. Since then I have learnt to know other sorrows, Ulrich; but we will not speak of *them*!

“ ‘ You, beloved brother, you will now be the only inheritor of my treasure—my Walter. I am teaching him now to say *Father*, for your sake, Ulrich. How bitter that the name of father must always have been unused by him, if he might not call you by it! But *you* will love him—will you not? You will be to him, Ulrich, what you have been to your dear little Hannah of old; and you will love him for my sake, and for Clement’s sake too,—will you not, dear Ulrich? However severely you may blame *him*, and however great his guilt may have been, yet he is still your brother, Ulrich. You have known him, and—whoever has once loved him—alas!

“ ‘ But my little Walter, his son!—his son whom he has forsaken! You will agree with me, dear Ulrich,—will you not?—that we should spare this son the misery of knowing anything about him.

“ ‘ If I have one request to make, more earnest and more heartfelt than another, it is this: Let my child be *wholly* your own—in your eyes, in his own eyes, and in those of all the world. You will educate him simply, not as the rich heir of Nordingen, but as an

active, sterling man. You will lead him to the Lord. And, Ulrich, dear, dear Ulrich, listen to one prayer more!—Forgive his father, forgive him wholly! Let no grudge against Clement dwell in the heart that shall be a place of refuge for his son. And if *I* have forgiven him, who has any right to be angry with him? Entreat God's mercy for him, Ulrich—he needs it. This I do also; I only think of him with prayers. I know that the tears he has cost me have fallen heavily into the balance before God's judgment-seat, and bear witness against him, and therefore I weep no more.'

“From my candlestick I followed every movement of her hand as she wrote, and saw her often pause to rest. Now I saw great drops fall from her eyes upon the last lines, half blotting them out, and giving them the lie. The pale lady passed her handkerchief across her eyes, sighed as if heavily oppressed, and added with a trembling hand a few more words:—

“‘Ulrich, I cannot go on;—my strength is exhausted. Come soon,—very soon! I cannot wait

much longer for you, my dearly-loved brother. **May** God reward you for the faithful love and thoughtful care which you have always shown for me! **May** my son one day be able to thank you for them. **Pray** for me, Ulrich, that I may pass away peacefully.'

“ She signed her name at the foot of the page, and folded it up. I helped her with my hot flame to seal the letter ; and, when it was done, she put out her hand towards the pointed metal cap which was hooked on to my little candlestick. My heart misgave me ; woe is me that I must die ! But just then a clear child's voice exclaimed, ‘ Mamma, dear Mamma ! ’ and I saw the little boy climbing up the stone steps before the open door. He had gathered up his little frock and filled it with pebbles ; and in his hand he held a bunch of wild field-flowers. His cheeks were glowing ; the evening breeze was playing with his curls. Then the young mother forgot to extinguish me. She stretched both arms towards the little one,



He ha gathered up his little frock and filled it with pebbles, and in his hand he held a bunch of wild field-flowers. *Page 222*

and the old woman lifted the child up, and set him on the table before his sick mother. Then she took away the candlestick, and—blew me out.”

As the expiring Will-o'-the-Wisp flickered away into the copsewood, another slender Flame glided across the morass from the side where the last had disappeared. He burned clearly and very steadily, as he slowly passed the creek. The Fireflies would have stopped him, but he waved them back, and, as he passed, he said in a suppressed voice :

“Hush, hush ! ask me nothing ! I could tell what you might not wish to hear. It is the same chamber, with the same bright marble walls, and fine matting on the floor. The glass door leading to the garden is fast closed. All sunlight—the heat of the May day—shut out. The dark window-curtains fall in folds down to the ground, and hinder

any ray from entering. Only towards the cool vestibule are the windows open.

“The breeze is playing gently in the curtain. All is quiet,—so quiet. She is sleeping now, the pale and lovely lady,—so calmly and soundly. She lies like still marble on the couch, draped in a flowing white garment. Two dark plaits fall from her temples—lustreless as mourning bands. I watch near her from my tall stand. It is so quiet, such deep silence reigns around.

“I hear the wood-worm ticking in the carved frame of the mirror, and the lamp on the mantel-piece sputters, and sends a fine film of smoke in little cloudlets through the room. I hear footsteps in the vestibule, heavy dragging steps, and the light tripping of a child's foot. Some one lays hold on the curtain. Thou sweet little curly head, what wilt thou here? She sleeps, she sleeps! Wilt

thou look upon the pale Mother sleeping as she never slept before? Oh, go!—depart all of you! She is sleeping so quietly, so calmly. Go! disturb her not! Do not awaken her. Hers is a deep, sound sleep! Hush! hush!”

And the Flame passed by, and disappeared into the wood.

CHAPTER XII.

The Spirit of the Chamber Candle.—The Lumber-room.—The pretty Pictures.—How morning broke on the Forest.—How the Sleeper sought his home.—And how the young Owllet heard strange tidings of the Water-lily.

“HEAR ye the frogs in the pool? Hear ye the Screech-Owl in the thicket? It is not well to listen to such sorrowful tales at night in the forest.” So said a Firefly; but the Water-lily said beseechingly: “Oh! we must hear just one more little story. Yonder Flame that has been skipping about so long among the roots of the trees must now tell us something.”

Then the Flame leaped out from among the roots of the blasted Oak, gave himself a shake, and said: “I am cold,—icy-cold on this chill

morass ! Yet so free and unfettered in the dark forest, in the dead of night ; ah ! free as a bird ! You cannot imagine what a Light-Spirit's feelings often are. When formerly I had to struggle for my life, it was in a small safe spot,—a home,—that I eked out my frail existence on the long wick of a wax candle. Then I felt confined and fettered, and in want. Now it seems to me, in sooth, as if the scanty wax and the tough wick had been very dear and much beloved, and my struggle for life a charming occupation. This boundless freedom frightens me ; I fear to lose myself. What is to feed me ? I live here, but on what ? Is it on memories ? ”

“ Give us some of your memories ; tell us about your necessitous life ! ” begged the Water-lily and the Rush-flowers.

“ I smell the morning dew, ” said the Flame ;
“ the reign of the Spirits of Night will soon

be over. Listen then to a short scrap of wax-taper life :

“The key grates in the lock, and the little door in the wainscoted wall opens. An old woman carries me lighted in her hand ; a little boy is clinging to her gown, and keeps on repeating, ‘Walter come into the little room too ! Walter come too !’

“A dark room,—boxes and chests stand around ; one old chest on massive feet. On shelves against the wall are rows of books bound in parchment ; broken vases in which still lies the dust of flowers fallen to pieces long ago. This green forest does not know the wonderful odour of dust and old books, and of old furniture in shut-up rooms. There is such a mysterious creaking there ; the spiders spin their airy webs, the wood-worm plies its work there undisturbed. As for the old books, who would have cared to listen to

them? I did not meddle with them; useless rubbish that had been banished hither; among them some of high pretensions, once much admired,—long since forgotten.

“I stand high up on a shelf. The old woman kneels on the floor, jingles a great bunch of keys, and opens with difficulty a heavy travelling-trunk, the lid of which is covered with many foreign labels; the trunk must have travelled a long way without its master. What are those dark things that she is taking out of it? Men’s clothes, one thing after another. And, as she unfolds them, there flutter forth on their downy wings the shadowy gray Agents of Decay. Having fretted their way into that which perishes, into that which is now no more, nourished by what they have themselves destroyed, they now flutter forth, set free from their long imprisonment. Escaping from the kingdom

of death, they seek that of life; escaping from darkness they seek the light,—even the light that destroys them. They seek the flame, the hot kiss of the flame, though they must die by it. As they surround me with fluttering wings, they murmur in low and ghostly voices the sorrowful songs which they learned down there in the darkness. The song of a passionate heart that once beat beneath those garments,—an ardent heart, full of guilt and passion,—a heart consumed by remorse, which now beats no more. Oh! be silent! Let not the child hear your songs! A child is innocent of guilt.”

“Oonk! Oo-oonk! Oonk!” The sorrowful cry sounded again, loud and eerie, from the Pool; but the Will-o'-the-Wisp took no heed of it, and proceeded thus:—“Where had the child gone? Behind the old trunk he was seated on the floor, and had taken some little



There he spread out the cards.

china plates and cups out of the glass-cup-board. These he was rocking to and fro in an empty doll's cradle, causing them to clatter against each other ; but soon tired of this play, he stood by the old woman, and watched her clearing out the box. Just then a little packet fell out from among the clothes, and playing-cards were scattered about the floor. 'Oh, pictures! pictures!' cried the delighted child, gathering them up in his little frock, and carrying them all off to the flat top of a chest. There he spread out the cards, knelt down and prattled as he played with them, laughing with flushed cheeks and a happy light in his dark blue eyes."

"Demons lurk in the gaudy cards," murmured a Forget-me-not.

"Then I heard steps," said the Flame ;
"there stood a tall grave man ; many lines

were on his noble brow and round his firm mouth ; many early threads of silver mingled with his dark hair. He looked troubled at the scene before him. When he perceived the boy, he asked hastily, 'How did the child get these cards, Bridget?' The old woman told him. He sighed deeply and went over to the boy. 'You have not said Good Morning to me, Walter,' said he. 'Good Morning, dear father,' cried the child, without looking up,—'just look at my pretty pictures !'

" 'The pictures are not yours, Walter,' said the grave man ; 'you will give them all now to Father.'

" 'With what a startled gaze the little one looked up at him, spreading both arms over the cards ! 'Oh ! look, Bridget !' I heard the man say,—'if those are not his mother's eyes !'—and he bent over the child, put out his hand,

and said gravely but kindly, 'Give me the cards now, Walter.'

"The little one said in an anxious coaxing way, 'Would you not rather have the cups, father?' But, when the man said, 'No.—I want the pictures, my child, and I must have them at once,' the boy's face glowed fiery red, his eyes flashed with passion, every feature of his little face trembled; and, sobbing violently, he threw himself with wild cries upon the cards, and shrieked, 'No! No! I won't give up my pictures—my pictures!'

"I think the evil spirit of obstinacy could not have often been the guest of that little child's heart. The old woman stood by, frightened, with folded hands; the man himself had turned quite pale; but he lifted the screaming child from the floor, gave him to the old woman, and told her to take him away until he would be good again. His pale

forehead was darkly clouded as he put the cards together again, and locked them up. He took me down from the shelf, and, as a drop of hot wax fell upon his hand, he shrank a little. His hand had a great scar upon it, and must surely once have had worse pain to bear than that. Sighing deeply he shut the door of the little room again, and paced to and fro in the chamber for a long while before his gloomy eyes fell on me, as I stood there still burning on a side-table. Then he took me up and extinguished me."

The little Will-o'-the-Wisp melted away into the night air when he had finished speaking. Far, far off, at the furthest edge of the Spectre-field, the Fireflies saw other Flames dancing, but they did not fly after them any more; they chose rather to flit noiselessly away and seek their green pavilion under the hazel-bushes on the bank. The

Horned Owl hooted to his niece the young Owlet. "We must not delay," said he to her, "if we wish to reach a convenient cavern to-night. The morning is already lurking behind the mountains, and that makes the roads dangerous." They flew off; and the Bat took the hint that had just been given, and set forth also on his homeward way.

The little Weeds and Grasses had dozed off during the last Will-o'-the-Wisp's story; but the poor Water-lily had been much saddened by all the sorrowful stories the Light-Spirits had been telling. Her flower-heart was so full of sympathy,—much too full to allow of her sleeping. A kind little Wavelet took her tired head upon her arm; and, pillowed thus softly, she rested, and looked dreamily up at the starless sky. And those grave child-like eyes, which had all this time gazed forth from beneath the Maple-tree, closed as

the last Will-o'-the-Wisp ceased to speak. Exhaustion kept them shut,—unconsciousness held them.

So it had at last become quite silent in the forest, and the silence continued unbroken till the heath-cock crowed from the thicket, and the morning sent forth her merry messengers, the breezes, to make for her a path through clouds and mist, whereby to enter the valley.

The cool air fanned the damp brow of the young sleeper under the Maple-tree, without awaking him from his sound slumber, till the sun had already overtopped the mountains, and breaking through the clouds, had made the trembling waters of the Frog-pool glisten beneath the greeting of its slanting rays which found their way between the tree-tops. Not till then did the boy awake from his sleep. He raised himself to a sitting posture on the

grass, and looked doubtfully and wonderingly around him.

There lay the Pool; the Spectre-field, with the green wood behind,—all still and peaceful, just the same as he had often seen them in days gone by.

What then had become so altered in himself that he could now only contemplate this verdant solitude with horror? No, no!—away from hence! Among mankind,—to the father. *Father?*—oh, that word! He pressed his hand upon his pale brow, pushed back the damp hair from his face; and, in going to recover his straw hat, which had rolled down the slope, he reached the little creek. There floated before him the silent Water-lily. Ah! if she could speak to him! He bent over the water, and having drawn the white blossom out with his stick, wound its long soft stem round his hat, the blossom hanging on one

side. It seemed as though the Fairies had decked the pale delicate boy. His dark eyes gazed so dreamily forth from under his ruffled curls. He took up his stick, buttoned his coat across him with a shudder, and set out wearily with a drooping head towards his home hard by.

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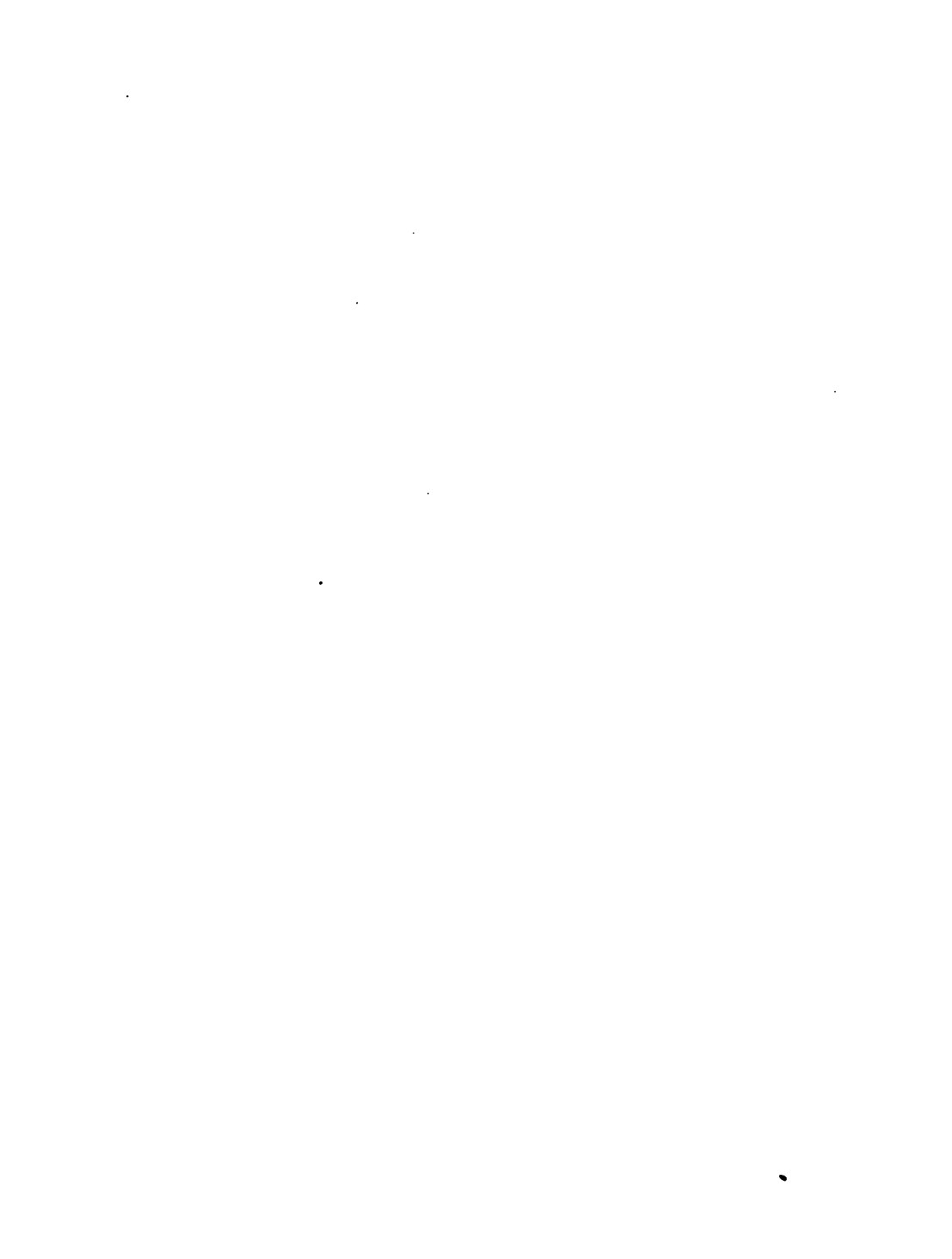
ONCE MORE IT WAS NIGHT in the forest,—a dark moonless night, one of the last in the month of July. But stars were sparkling in the dark vault of heaven, and were reflected, twinkling gently, in the still waters of the Frog-pool. A light mist lay over the morass; the air was sultry; it was long since any refreshing rain had fallen, and the little Weeds and Grasses stood athirst with drooping heads, and would willingly have drawn water now, without complaining of the hard work. They stretched themselves and jostled each other

in order to obtain but a mouthful of night-dew, with which they might sparingly sustain life. The midsummer manœuvres had long been over, and many of the Insect regiments had left the forest and retired to their garrisons, there to receive new uniforms. The Fireflies, too, no longer flitted among the bushes by the bank, and no white Water-lily blossomed in the silent little creek. The spot on the slope beneath the Maple was vacant, and the rushes on the bank had shot up still higher and grown more densely together.

The old blasted Oak-trunk, however, stood still unaltered on the narrow tongue of land; and his withered arms had not become tired of stretching out threateningly over the Pool. On one of his branches the young Owlet had once more settled herself. She and her uncle, the old Horned Owl, were already returning

from their great Italian journey. They had given up Greece, as they had heard of disturbances which had broken out there ; but in Italy alone they had collected notices enough about the nearly extinct descendants of Minerva's Owl, to enable ten men learned in the law to use up reams of paper and to write for years on the subject. The Owlet had corresponded a great deal on this journey, and besides had made use of her leisure to write an interesting journal. A very sentimental love affair with a young Eagle was described therein ; which, by the way, like many love affairs told of, both in published and unpublished journals, took place more in the writer's fancy than in reality.

On the present night, as Uncle Owl wished to visit an old friend whom he had not met for a long time, in the corner tower of the





Is it to be even more dismal here now than it was before ?

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old Manor-house of Nordingen, his nobly-born niece had employed the time in taking a flight to the Frog-pool. She wished to let the young Water-lily and other simple children of the quiet forest yonder profit by her views of the world, lately extended and enlarged by her travels. But Miss Owlet found that a period of four weeks is one during which many alterations may take place in the outward circumstances of flowers, fireflies and bramble-trails. She sat on the oak-bough and looked round in vain for the acquaintances made by her on that Midsummer eve.

“Is it to be even more dismal here now than it was before!” sighed she to herself; and then she asked aloud: “Is there nobody here who can give me information as to what has become of the young Water-lily which bloomed here in the little creek?”

CHAPTER XIII.

The Spirits of the Study-lamp, and of the Funeral Torch.—How Walter confessed his fault and was forgiven.—How the last Heir of Nordingen entered the home of his Forefathers, and how he left it.—How only One kept tryst on the Mountain Ridge; but a little Lark soared Heavenward singing—singing.

ON the Spectre-field one solitary Will-o'-the-Wisp had just begun his fantastic dance.

“There comes an endurable companion!” said the young Owlet, beginning to flutter a greeting, and to flash her bright eyes, so as to attract the attention of the Will-o'-the-Wisp who approached her. “I have already seen Will-o'-the-Wisps here,” said she. “They had experienced all sorts of things, and could tell stories. Are you also the Spirit of a

departed Light, and can you too relate a story ?”

“ I too am a Light-Spirit,” replied the Will-o'-the-Wisp ; “ but I know of no stories to tell except about my own experience. You can hear about that ; but I think you will not care for it.—Well, so be it. I see the Rush-flowers are bending forward and wishing to hear also.

“ I have seen but little of the world and of human beings. I came into the world prematurely, and had not, from the first, the advantage of shining as I ought to have done. The poor old withered hands which kindled me,—hands which had worked during a whole life with untiring faithfulness,—had often been folded in prayer. This might easily have been read in their owner's furrowed face, and in the good honest eyes with which she looked down on me. In that face long years and

years of sorrow had left their traces in deep lines. Those eyes, once clear, had wept much ; what wonder, then, that they had grown dim, and that the old woman had lighted me while the sun still stood above the hills !

“The reflection of the evening sky still filled the room as she placed me on the table, and then screwed me down on my wick, so that I could not flicker nor raise myself erect.

“I stood suppressed under the green shade of the Reading-lamp and listened. The old woman had gone out. It was not yet time to examine the books and papers on the table, as I had to do that in company with the Master of the room ; so I let my gaze wander around.

“A comfortable, spacious chamber, with many book-cases on the walls, and many pictures, many family portraits. Looking at pictures takes up much time. I will not

describe them to you, even if the sweet blue eyes in a tender woman's face should be already known to you, you wise and travelled Bird. The great bow-window stood wide open; I saw the trees in the garden, the field and wood—the hills,—and, beyond all, the floating red evening clouds edged with light. Long ago the old Ivy outside had clambered up to the window and bound a fresh dark garland round its spacious bay. The evening breeze stirred its young shoots, and, framed by the green trails, there sat on the window-sill a slender boy with curly brown hair.

“Though the hills were glowing with evening light, the boy did not look up at them. His head was resting on the breast of a tall man who stood before him and held him in his arms. They were speaking to each other in low tones. I listened—heard plaintive

words, painful sobbing, and hesitating, broken speech from a heavily-laden breast. Which was the more moved—the youth or the grave man? Which was the paler? A confession was being whispered.

“What is it, poor boy, that you have done? Only deep guilt can so mightily move this steadfast man. *What* have you done ‘*but once?*’—Played? Have you gambled? That was it! You had solemnly promised your father never to touch a card, and did you break this vow?

“I saw the boy raise his dark tearful eyes. ‘Father, father, you surely believe me, that it was only that once?’

“‘I believe you, my son,’ said he; ‘I believe you. It would indeed be terrible if I could not believe you in this thing.’

“Then the boy whispered, ‘Oh, look not on me like that, my father! In your eyes I

cannot see that you believe me, and have forgiven me.'

"The answer sounded grave and solemn. 'I believe you, and I forgive you this first heavy transgression; but it has hurt me sorely, Walter.'

"'Alas, father! and I feel so glad that I have confessed it to you!' And then he told how, the day before, he had fled in the rain up the hill, merely because the other youths were playing cards, and he feared he might be persuaded to be untrue to his word again.

"'I thank God, who gave you the strength to flee,' said the father.

"The boy seized his hand and pressed it to his lips. 'Oh, dear, dear father!' said he softly, gazing with a strange look at the hand, and at an old scar upon it often seen before. How ill and pale the poor boy looked! And

then I heard the question, 'Walter, are you not ill?'

"'I don't know, father,' said he. 'My head aches very much; but I have so much to think about. Ah, if I could but tell you what the Will-o'-the-Wisps in the wood were talking about!'

"The other laid his hand upon the boy's forehead. 'You are feverish, my son; the damp night in the forest has done you no good.'

"The old woman entered. She sighed out, as if frightened, 'Oh, how ill he looks! He is surely ill—has caught a fever. I thought it was so!'

"'I am only shivering,' whispered the boy, resting his head once more upon his father's shoulder. 'Ah, the forest—the forest! Oh! if I could but tell you what I saw and heard there! If I could but ask you, father!'

“‘What, my child?—what would you ask me?’ said the grave man gently.

“‘I would ask,—ask, father . . . and I should not be able to bear the answer.’ Then he raised himself suddenly, and looked into his father’s face with great wide-open eyes. ‘If I were to ask whether you are *really my father?* . . . No, no ; say nothing!’ He laid both hands entreatingly over the pale man’s mouth. ‘Yes, —I am ill ; I can listen to nothing. Come, Bridget,’ he said in a childlike manner, putting out his hand,—‘come, put your little Walter to bed.’

“Then they went away together. The Master of the house took up the lamp and followed them ; and in the doorway—the draught blew me out.”

The Will-o'-the-Wisp had disappeared, the Rushes shivered, the Frogs croaked in the pool, and the young Owlet was considering

whether or not she should fly to the Manor-house to fetch Uncle Owl thence,—when she saw a Light gleam forth, large and full, far away in the wood.

It hovered along over the morass, approaching nearer and nearer.

“Stay, Will-o'-the-Wisp,—stay,” cried the Owlet, just as he arrived at the edge of the pool, for she feared he might plunge into the water and be extinguished.

“Oh, yes! ‘Will-o'-the-Wisp! Will-o'-the-Wisp!’” retorted he. “But lately a stately torch, and now a despicable Will-o'-the-Wisp, upon a bewitched morass.”

“But lately a Torch? How was that?” asked the Owlet.

“Wilt thou hear how that was? *Canst* thou hear it? Art thou strong?”

“Oh, *I?*” said the Owlet. “*I* can listen to anything.”

“But is it worth while to tell thee anything?” asked the Flame. “Hast thou a heart,—and is there any feeling in it?”

The Owlet assumed an offended air; but the Ivy-trail exclaimed, from the other side of the water :

“Tell us, dear Light, what you have experienced. I am not strong, indeed, but *I hold fast*; and that is the way in which we weak ones remain upright long, and can bear a great deal. Only let me assure you that a feeling heart listens to you. A simple word, easily forgotten, seems to be of no account; but who knows its secret working? What I have grasped, I hold fast. Therefore Men trust my evergreen leaves, and have consecrated me to memory. I rejoice in being present where old half-ruined walls discourse of by-gone years. I will faithfully preserve your experience also, and will render the best

of it again to human beings. Be faithful and patient, and hold fast."

"Very well; then listen," said the Will-o'-the-Wisp. "Many birds who once soared in their strength have had their pinions maimed. Many a tree which once bore its crown cheerily and proudly has been felled. The old Elms are still standing in the park. They whisper in the mild night air—'Wherefore disturb us? Wherefore awaken us from our deep dreams with the glare of lights at midnight? What moves—what whispers and rustles within the old walls? For whom glimmer the tapers? For whom do the flowers breathe forth their fragrance there? The chambers are desolate; the noble lords are dead; the heir is far distant. Yea,—desolate, dead, and distant.' Thus whisper the Elms in the gloomy park, and the windows gleam afar through the night. The hall-door, giving

access from the terraces, stands hospitably open. The doorway is wreathed with flowery garlands; and flowers are strewn on the stone steps in front of that old Manor-house at Nordingen."

"Were you *there*?—Were you in the Manor-house of Nordingen?" asked the Owlet.

"Not yet; not yet," replied the Will-o'-the-Wisp. "In the valley—in the flower-garden. The little old house there has no shining windows. The Walnut trees stretch their branches far over it,—the ivy embraces it on every side; it is its faithful, dusky friend. Twelve tapers wait before its door; twelve youths of the valley are the torch-bearers. One of the brightest torches was I. How bright and gleaming! And night fell around, and the house was so dark! Behind the bow-window at the corner there glimmered a feeble light. The dark Ivy-trails

tapped softly against the panes. Say, then, what do ye see within? What have ye seen there for weeks past?

“The Ivy-trails wave to and fro and beckon—
—‘Ask not. Ask not.’

“Then the door swings open, and a bier is carried forth. Grave men with grey hair are bearing it;—they are house-fathers of Nordingen, who have begged for the privilege of carrying this burden. Behind the bier a tall, pale man, in black, priestly garb, is pacing down the steps, and beside him a woman bent with age. I hear his voice—
‘Come here, Bridget. Lean on me; it is too much for you alone.’ And the poor old woman passes her trembling hand through his arm, and looks up at him with grateful admiration through her tears.

“Dark and silent is the night. The startled jackdaws flutter round the gloomy gables;

the water trickles monotonously out of the old fountains, splashing dolefully into the wide basins.

“Thus goes the procession: Preceded and flanked by the torch-bearers, is borne the bier, and close behind it follow the dark forms of the mourners. The shadows of night withdraw startled, where the brilliant torch-light falls. Not so the sorrowful shadows on their pale faces.

“Through the meadow where the willows stand—over the stone bridge of the little stream—along the edge of the wood, are we borne;—bright torches, and the dark bier. We throw a dazzling light into the gloomy forest. Squirrels approach inquisitively, and I see some young roes stop to gaze through the bushes. Once more we cross the stream by the weather-beaten bridge of birch-trunks at the postern-gate of the park. A gentle

breeze moves the Limes and Plane-trees, whose branches rustle in solemn greeting, as the procession paces through the shaded alleys.

“From afar the Manor-house signals a welcome with the clear light of burning Tapers, and the Elms offer a greeting with their waving, whispering gloom.

“On the terrace the household servants and many inhabitants of the valley bow their heads in silence, as the bier is carried up the stone steps, and through the open door. The torch-bearers remain without, and we with them.

“Within, in the hall, I saw the bier set down upon trestles decked with flowers and leaves, and the faithful Ivy. I saw the tall man in priestly garments come forward and lean upon the bier. He sighed deeply and heavily, as though he bore a burden like to crush him. There were tears and grief on

every face around, except on that of a wondrously lovely maiden in white garments, which looked down out of a broad frame from the wall above. Cornflowers adorned her brown plaits, and sweet, childlike joyousness beamed from her dark blue eyes. I saw too that a long mourning streamer of crape was hanging down from this picture, and that a wreath of white mallow had been twined around it.

“The doors were shut. The Manor-house of Nordingen had received its last heir. He had entered on his bier, in order to be carried forth from those old walls early on the following morning on his last earthly journey—to that little God’s-acre wherein his grandparents slept. We torches had fulfilled our mourning duty, and were extinguished.”

“Where did your brethren remain?” asked the young Owlet.

The Will-o'-the-Wisp did not answer, but

hovered slowly back over the Spectre-field. It seemed to the Owlet as if, far away, where some large Oaks overshadowed the morass, other Flames were flitting about; but the distance was too great for her to be certain about this, and none of them came any nearer. Then she formed a sudden resolution,—spread her wings, and without a word of farewell to the patient old Oak-stump or the kindly little Wavelets at his feet, she flew off to the mountains, and a soft whisper breathed through the leaves of the ivy.

* * * * *

AS THE MORNING sent her first bright beams down into the valley, there stood the green forest, refreshed by the dew, to greet her. The tree-tops stirred, and a mysterious rustle ran through their branches. The wild duck, who had built her cool summer-dwelling among the rushes on the bank, led

her brood of little ones out on the pool to begin the day with a swimming lesson.

The Rush-flowers exchanged morning greetings, and wondered to see that, on the green spot on the slope beneath the Maple, a delicate dark-blue *Campanula* had blossomed on a tall slender stalk, where there had been neither leaf nor bud to be seen the day before. The Frogs were croaking loudly again in the Pool, and the little church of Nordingen had to-day sent forth the loudest voice of its bells, which were tolling with doubled strokes across the valley,—monotonous and sorrowful, like the moan of ocean-waves when, after a night of storm, they wash up wreckage and corpses on to the shore,—and yet solemn and religious—also like the ocean-waves. A funeral knell was sounding forth upon the morning air from the ancient little church. . . .

As the last knell died away, there was a

rustling through the copsewood on the clearing in the forest, half way up the hill; and, with firm and active tread, a youthful traveller stepped forth on to the projecting mountain-ridge.

The boy's light hair waved in the morning breeze, and his cheeks were glowing with joyful expectation.

He looked around him, and the glad light in his eyes seemed to be somewhat dimmed by a shade of disappointment. He took off his straw hat, passed his handkerchief across his heated brow, put down his staff and his wallet, and lay down in a waiting attitude.

It was impossible, however, for him to lie still for long, while the sun was shining so fiercely on the rocks, and while his anticipation of the pleasure which he expected to come to him from the valley was so exciting. He sprang up again,—looked down into the



The boy took his hat and wallet, and his light staff, and with drooping head, turned back slowly towards the forest.

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valley,—climbed downwards a little way, and again turned round. He clambered to the top of each neighbouring rock to obtain a wider view, and his heart beat more and more anxiously. Each time he took out his watch he seemed more and more disappointed.

But now there are two dark specks yonder on the winding line between the corn-fields. That must be the path that leads up hither ; and these two must be Walter and his father !

They came nearer ; they turned to the left. What did that mean ? . . . Ah, no ; they were two tardy reapers who were going to the harvest-field. Yes ; it was harvest-time, and the poor boy did not consider that God the Lord has a harvest every day, and can cut green ears as well as riper ones.

A post-horn sounded. Oh, already ? already ? The boy took his hat and wallet,

and his light staff, and, with a drooping head, turned back slowly towards the forest.

The sun rose higher and higher above the desolate mountain-ridge, — the grass-stems trembled in the sultry air,—a fir-cone fell here and there in the forest, or a squirrel rustled through the leaves. The valley lay still and peaceful amid green foliage and golden corn. No sound from it reached upwards to this height ; but far up in the azure sky, a little lark was soaring,—and singing,—singing.

THE END.

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